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Tilting At Windmills: Public-Private Partnerships In Indian Education Today

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Tilting at Windmills: public-private partnerships in Indian education today

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Abstract

There are many obstacles to the successful provision of universal primary and secondary education. The failure of state schools to provide adequate schooling is a serious hindrance to achieving the international goal of Education for All. Non-state providers of education are regarded as an alternative but the variation in the quality of education provided is a growing concern. Educational partnerships between the public and private sector have been regarded as a way out of this impasse in the United States and Western Europe and there has been considerable debate about the economic and political implications of these public private partnerships (PPPs). Disentangling the economic and political dimensions of provision would further our understanding of these new models of educational provision. This paper sets out a typology of identifying the economic and political aspects of provision through using the Hirschmanian concepts of 'exit' and 'voice'. The idea of exit draws on the mainstream economic understanding of free entry and exit with the latter occurring when individuals were no longer satisfied with what was on offer in the market. The term voice is used to denote political activity undertaken by an individual to ensure the continued provision of a good and/or the quality of the good. Conceptualizing educational provision in relation to exit and voice permits the examination of how the role of the market and community affect the access to and quality of education. Educational initiatives by state and non-state providers in India are mapped onto this typology to gain an understanding of how the new models of education, such as PPPs, would affect the current provision of education.

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1. New Perspectives on the Provision of Education

The provision of schooling at the beginning of the 21st Century is not yet universal and the difficulties in accessing and benefiting from primary and secondary education have become areas of concern. The challenges facing the state with regard to the universal provision of education at these two levels are becoming noticeable in a number of areas. Firstly, the failure of state schools to provide adequate schooling has driven parents to seek alternative providers. Secondly, there is a variation in the quality of education provided by non-state providers of education indicating the need for regulating the sector. Thirdly, there is a growing commercial interest in the educational sector with an increase in new providers who are changing the terrain of the education sector. These difficulties have begun to exercise the academic and policy worlds and are now the focus of new thinking on the way forward in the provision of education.

The new thinking in policy relates to the emergence of a paradigm of **New Public Management** in Western Europe that regards the introduction of the ethos of profit-making into the state sector as a beneficial feature to ensure better and more efficient production of services. The improvements in the public sector are also envisaged through a sharing of personnel between the private and public sector providers thereby bringing about a shared set of incentives and a common culture. There has consequently been a move from a single provider approach to considering the way to bring in the advantages of a multi-provider approach. The presence of both public and private providers, often jointly producing education has led to the formulation of public-private partnerships in the provision of education. The increasing contribution of the private sector in extending the provision of education has led to arguments that the private sector might be the way forward to reach the poorest sections of society (Tooley, 2005). The difficulties emerging in the provision of schooling have also been picked up by the theoretical literature on the economics of education where the focus has been on ascertaining the reasons for the growing failure in the state sector and remedying this weakness by a greater emulation of the principles operating in the private commercial sector. This focus has been on strengthening the contractual aspects of service provision rather than on a detailed presentation of the conceptual framework behind forms of provision. The considerable influence of the **New Political Economy** School is evident here with its proposition that the state as a monopoly provider seeks its own self-interest rather than the public good.

The introduction of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in education in Western Europe and the United States began in the 1990s. The expansion of this new form of provision has paved the way for recommendations that developing countries might embark on these ventures to improve educational access and quality in their school sector (Patrinos, 2005). However there are concerns that the ready offering of this new model of education provision might be hasty at best and wrong at worst. Firstly, because there has been an inadequate evaluation of the public-private partnerships that have been established in Europe and North America (Osborne, 2000). What evaluation has been undertaken indicates that the conceptual framework for PPPs is weak, for instance, the bringing together of public

and private providers without due regard about whether their objectives had considerable overlap or even an element of conflict raises doubts about the feasibility of such arrangements (Levin, 1999). Also, it seems that political ideology and social policy played a significant role in fashioning partnerships and the weight of economic and educational arguments in these models might be questionable (Common, 2000). Any prescription for advancing the case of public-private partnerships to developing countries requires careful consideration of the economics and politics that underlie this form of provision of education.

In developing countries, the state's ability to provide an adequate and acceptable level of education has been scrutinised over the last two decades. Private providers of education have long been present in Indian education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The possibility of partnerships in education has emerged at the tertiary level with the increased demand for Indian university education both within India and outside¹. It has yet to emerge as a contending framework for provision in the Indian school system. The model has been suggested as a panacea to ills of the Indian state school system (World Bank, 2005). To understand the basis and impact of the emergence of partnerships in Indian schooling it would be necessary to consider the conceptual as well as contractual aspects of partnerships that are already in use in other parts of the world. The evidence from the North on such partnerships needs to be placed alongside the Indian experience of private providers in primary and secondary education. This would help to identify whether the models of partnerships in education developed in the North are pertinent and fit in to the liberalising Indian market for goods and services. This exercise must be undertaken within the context of the changing terrain of Indian education rather than on a 'one-size fits all' approach.

2. The role of partnership in education

There was a rise of partnerships in the provision of health and education during the 1990s in western economies. The argument for these partnerships was to bring in the management practices of the private sector into the public sector and improve competitiveness and increase efficiency. The understanding was that this would make public expenditure more effective and in some cases would attract financial investment from the private sector.

Partnerships in education have been driven by the need for more finances to run the ailing school system as well as the need to improve the quality of provision through raising management standards in schools. There is a strong element of parental choice that has pushed for these new forms of school provision. The desire of parents to select the best school for their children in a state schooling system where admission criteria are based on the distance between home and the school have generated a new set of pressures of the schooling system. The rise of parental choice within the educational system in the United Kingdom has been associated with a global rise of a neo-liberal agenda in the international economic arena that emphasises an expansion of the market and the simultaneous rolling back of state provision in national economies (Ball, 2007).

A key driver for public-private partnerships (PPPs) in the United Kingdom was the Private Finance Initiative bill (PFI) that was introduced by the government in 1997. The PFI was regarded as an instrument to bring in finance from the sector and to improve the financial management of schools. The emphasis was on the 'value for money' (VfM) dimension of educational provision. The thinking behind the PFI was that the private sector was more efficient in terms of delivery than the public sector, and that the introduction of private sector principles into the state education sector would improve its efficiency and performance. This improvement was to be measured through a specific indicator constructed for this purpose, the Public Sector Comparator (PSC) (HM Treasury, 2001). The PSC was to evaluate whether the contribution of the private provider had indeed improved the financial performance of the school over that of previously provided by the state management. Where the PSC showed that there had not been a significant improvement and VfM was not being generated the contract of the private provider would be terminated and the private entity would have to make additional payments for the breach in contract. The PFI approach was strongly influenced by the New Public Management thinking of the late 1980s that was keen to bring in corporate efficiency and innovation into an underperforming state sector. There appears to have been a greater engagement with the political ideology of bringing in the private sector rather than any substantial economic gain that was a key factor in the introduction of PPPs into the education system in the UK (Ball, *ibid*).

The rise in educational partnerships in the United States is closely related to the emergence of the schooling movement of the 1980s. The concern among local communities at the collapse in state provision of schools mirrors the larger concerns voiced regarding the governance crisis in administration in the United States. The inability of the state to address the problem of failing schools and the need to create more accountable schools have become a major concern in communities and this parent spearheaded movement has resulted in a new form of schooling partnership. The development of the charter school model entails contracting a school from the state that is managed by the parents in a community and it has provided a new form of accountability to local schools. Charter schools began to emerge in 1991 and by the mid 1990s numerous states were advocating legislation to advance this type of provision. The charter school idea is based on the principle that state schools are dragged down by the failing state system and the ability to extricate individual schools from this morass under parental management permits them to have a new lease of life. The success of the charter school movement has been that the new form of partnership has injected new life and content into teaching and learning within local communities. The charter model has been flagged as a success with its emphasis on community level ownership that fosters entrepreneurship and accountability (Hoxby, 2003).

The introduction of PPPs across western countries has been to meet the demands of parents and communities within the existing network of state schooling. PPPs are seen as a form of school provision that is able to improve the quality of schooling through emphasising the need to pay closer attention to the supply and demand aspects of the economics of provision. The ability of the private

corporate sector in the UK and the community to improve schools appears to lie in an improved set of management practices. The achievements of the PPP form of provision should consequently be evident in areas of service delivery and accountability. The differences between the types of PPPs adopted in the UK and the USA indicate that PPPs will conform to a 'one-size fits all' idea but will be based on the demands of the political processes and not governed by economic considerations alone. There does appear to be a strong element of national ideology and social policy in fashioning the terrain of public-private partnerships to date in western countries (Common, 2001).

The manner in which state and non-state players regard each other in the education sector is an important starting point for identifying the type of PPPs that might emerge as providers of schooling. Where there is a political and/or economic shift in the field of education new thinking emerges regarding the provision of education. The shift in the 1980s and 1990s towards more market-oriented and contractual based approaches is a case in point. The term 'private' sector in these partnerships currently covers all non-state actors with corporate entities, NGOs and faith based organisations all falling into this category. The early models of partnerships focussed on the gains from private financing while current thinking indicates that private provision of schools by various non-state providers such as the corporate, NGO, charity and faith schools is an area of growing interest. There is consequently a need to differentiate between these different players as they are likely to have distinct approaches to education provision emerging from their own historical evolution as well as economic motivation (Fennell, 2006).

These new types of providers will change the nature of the educational terrain as they bring in a growing range of educational objectives through possibly differing political understandings and economic expectations. Examining the supply and demand of education by disentangling the economic and political strands in the debate of educational provision is a useful exercise for opening up this new educational environment. The economic and political tools of analysis in the educational sector provide an opportunity for undertaking interdisciplinary research on the role and impact of PPPs.

3. A theoretical framework for examining the nature of partnerships

The current interest in evaluating how PPPs might bolster demand and supply of education has generated an interest in using new tools of measurement (Coady & Parker 2004). One method of identifying the economic and political aspects of provision is through using concepts of 'exit' and 'voice'. The concepts of **exit**, **voice** and **loyalty** were first used by Hirschman to examine individual behaviour within organisations that operated under the rules of the market (Hirschman 1970, 1978). The idea of **exit** draws on the mainstream economic understanding of free entry and exit with the latter occurring when individuals were no longer satisfied with what was on offer in the market. Within the context of an organisational set up the notion of **exit** relates to the decision to leave a provider on account of dissatisfaction. The term **voice** is used to denote political activity undertaken by an

individual while remaining within an organisation to ensure the continued provision of a good and/or the quality of the good. An individual who exits a market where they were unhappy with the quality of a good would be making an economic response. If the individual chose to stay on and demand improvements through use of ‘voice’ is regarded as a political stance.

In relation to the provision of education, these concepts can be used to analyse how consumer behaviour affects the quantity and quality of education (Hirschman 1978). If **exit** is present it indicates a choice exercised by the parents (and children) between the types/quality of education provided by different providers in the locality. Where **voice** is exercised by parents and pupils in the school system there is evidence of political activity ranging from complaints to campaigns to obtain a higher quality and wider coverage of education in the school. Using the term **exit** to denote choice in a market context while **voice** is evidence of political responsiveness provide two important tools to identify the relationship between consumers, the school and the providers in the local sphere. The analysis would allow us to look at the choices made by parents between government schools and private schools. So where public and private schools are present in a locality the phenomenon of exit can provide an indication of the failure of the state education system to provide a sufficient coverage and quality of education. The exiting of parents has implications for the quality of provision in the local sphere. It has been shown that the large scale exiting of the middle classes from the public education system may trigger a reduction in state commitment to finance state education (Easterly, 2000). Consequently economic behaviour of exiting public education can affect overall education provision in the local sphere.

The use of political behaviour also has impacts on provision. A significant use of voice by parents in the local sphere could result in an improvement of the level and type of educational provision (Chubb & Moe 1988)ⁱⁱ. The use of voice by parents and communities impacts on the provider in a demand driven environment and articulation of demands could shift the resource allocation pattern of private providers as well as the local state. This use of a political tool to change the provision of education by an existing provider points to the possibility of improving educational quality in schools. The obverse is also interesting, that the inability to use voice could lead to a serious deterioration in the quality of education.

The possibility of drawing on the actions of exit and voice to identify the economic and political strands in the provision of education permit us to examine how provision by the state and non-state providers affect the supply and demand of education in the local sphere. It would appear that exit has the impact of changing the supply response between state and non-state while voice affects the quality of provision. Given the possibility of using both exit and voice as actions it would be useful to see what pressures various combinations of exit and voice generate.

The relationship of voice and exit to economic and political responses to the provision of education is set out as in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Using the notions of exit and Voice in Education

		Voice	
		Yes	No
Exit	Yes	new models (Case 2)	market based provision (Case 1)
	No	community (Case 3)	excluded groups (Case 4)

The table sets out the implications of combinations of exit and voice within the educational sector.

In the north-east corner is the case of where there is the possibility of exit and no possibility of voice (Case 1) where providers would respond to the threat of exit by parents/users of education but would not face political opposition. This situation occurs where there is a market-based provision of education and providers of education are concerned about individuals voting with their feet when faced with poor provision. If ability of the users of education to cease to take up education from a particular provider becomes an economic threat this could force private providers to improve the nature of provision. Where the exit does not have adverse negative consequences for the providers, for instance where educational provision does not depend on payment by the user, there may not be any adverse impact of exit on the provider.

In the north-west configuration (Case 2) is the situation where there is the presence of both exit and voice. This scenario emerges where parents feel able to use both the options of exiting the sector as well as making demands on the provider when faced with a falling quality of education and/or returns from education. The possibility of using economic pressure and political representation places the parent/community in a strong position. The Case 2 scenario is dependent on parents/users having both economic and political wherewithal to use exit and voice respectively. Where the

consumer was able to participate fully it might be possible for partnerships to develop between the state and non-state providers to meet the demands for an improved and more effective provision of education.

In the south-west corner is located the case where there is the presence of voice but with no exit (Case 3). Case 3 highlights the possibility of using political pressure on the educational provider to demand improvements in education. The use of political action is linked to the extent to which collective action is used by the community concerned. Where a community is aware and actively using political agency to demand services there could be pressure on the educational provider to improve services. Case 3 might also be in operation in the case of traditional communities who tend to regard their group identity as a social marker and where exit is not seen as an option due to limited spatial and/or social mobility. Such communities would enunciate their claims but their lack of financial resources and engagement with the larger economic sphere would make it hard for these claims to translate into improved schooling. There would consequently be little impact on the provision of education despite a situation of where education is failing to deliver any benefits to the community.

Finally the south-east configuration is the case of no voice and no exit (Case 4) where the provision of education is marked by an absence of both economic and political challenge. The users of education are in a proverbial dead-end where they have no means to signal dissatisfaction with the education provided. Case 4 would be in operation where groups have neither political nor economic power. This can occur where there is a monopoly provider operating in very poor communities. It would also happen where there are groups that are denied educational access due to economic and social exclusion. These groups do not regard educational provision as a reality for their particular group or family on account of their exclusion and are unlikely to make any use of exit or voice. The group has traditionally been outside of the domain of provision and would not regard the provision of education as either an economic or political right.

These four scenarios provide a starting point to mapping out how the economic logic of the market and the power of political representation affect the financing and provision of education by a range of providers, both state and non-state. It would be valuable to learn whether market driven solutions are equally effective in ensuring both finance and physical provision by non-state providers in Case 1. In Case 2, which is the preferred arena for the new PPPs which operate to improve the demand side of educational provision, it would be worth exploring the extent to which attention given to improving current provision and how quality improvements are measured. In Case 3 there is the possibility of Charter schools where communities have a history of collective action. At the other end there is also the case of traditional communities with little or no knowledge of market based processes it would be important to know whether there was deterioration in the quantity and quality of provision. In the context of exclusion identified in Case 4 it would be critical to explore the implications of being denied access to the educational system.

The consequences of actions such as exit and voice affect the providers as well as the purchasers/consumers of education. For instance, where the non-state sector reduces supply-side problems in education through the building of additional schools and facilitating improvements in existing schools there would be an improvement in the education but might trigger an internal movement of students from state to non-state schools to avail of the improved private provision. Where the non-state sector is responding to voice the demands of the community provide the direction for improvement. The desire for education expressed by parents and other members of the community are deduced by providers in terms of their willingness to pay for the same. The monetary valuation of education and the increased desire to meet it through private provision has possible negative consequences for poor households who could end up paying for the cost of education either directly in additional fees or indirectly through hidden charges. The new models of provision that focus on supply and demand aspects of provision though in keeping with individual choice do not necessarily provide an equitable solution in a political or financial sense.

The understanding of new models that can be provided by unravelling the economic and political strands of educational provision can be meaningfully applied to the changes that are currently evident in the provision of schooling in India. There has been a rise in the number of non-state initiatives that engage in different ways with the state sector. The inability of the state sector to provide schooling has been cited as a major cause for the rise in non-state schools. The PROBE report pointed to the failure of government to provide education of an acceptable level and it has been identified as a major reason for the falling numbers of children in the State education sector in India (De & Dreze 1999). The inability of the State education system to retain children in schools has also been identified as a major reason for parental preference for private schools as well as the superior performance of children in the private school system (Kingdon, 1996).

The Indian state, on its part, has made a concerted effort since the 1990s to meet international goals of universal schooling through state led programmes for increasing enrolment. The increase in non-state and state activity in the educational sector provides an opportunity to understand the nature of engagement between the two sectors and the next section will explore this possibility.

4. The new terrain of education

The 1990s have seen an extremely ambitious educational programme in India and the launching of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) by the Government of India in 1994 with the objectives of providing universal access to school as well as reducing the overall drop out rates and gaps in enrolment and improve the learning achievement by gender and social group. The programme was the most intensive educational intervention ever attempted by the central government and had a strong gender component with a low level of female literacy being a primary selection criterion for the districts chosen in the seven states of Assam, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu during the first phaseⁱⁱⁱ. The results of the DPEP programme

indicated that there was greater enrolment in DPEP districts than non-DPEP districts and that primary enrolment of girls increased at a faster rate than boys in the DPEP districts.

The evaluations of DPEP carried out by Indian educational institutions have shown a varying degree of success across Indian states and recent academic research points out that the methodological approach to selection and implementation within the DPEP programme make it difficult, if not impossible to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the programme.^{iv} The programme was however a valuable opportunity to examine the weaknesses and strengths of the Indian education system and an attempt was made to address the problems of evaluation in the formulation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) by locating it at the district level to provide a strong administrative basis for the collection and monitoring of educational statistics. The SSA programme was introduced in 2001 with the ambitious target of achieving universal primary enrolment by 2003 and is currently being restructured in terms of priority districts and indicators to facilitate achievement of improved secondary level performance.^v

The Indian State has come to be regarded as an enthusiastic supporter of the many international initiatives for the extension and expansion of educational provision that emerged through the decade of the 1990s. The decentralisation measures of the Indian government introduced through the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian constitution facilitated the provision of local finances for educational programmes, particularly through the provision of international funds for district programmes such as DPEP. There was simultaneously an increase in the number of NGO initiatives with regard to programmes such as EFA and Universal Elementary Education (UEE) in the 1990s. This large scale and active role of the State in ensuring educational provision at the district level at a time when the non-state sector was also expanding is an interesting feature in educational provision. The non-State sector, particularly NGOs have been regarded as helpful in accessing the most difficult to access populations but have not been viewed as long-term or even reliable partners in the provision of education.^{vi} As both the state and a variety of non-state providers operate in India the nature of interactions between them in the provision of education would further our understanding of the changing supply of education.

The provision of education by non-state providers, by both for-profit and not-for-profit organisations, has not materialised in a uniform manner either across the education sector or across Indian states. There appears to be an increase both at the top and bottom end of the educational sector with top-fee paying schools mushrooming in the mega cities and private, registered and unregistered schools finding their way at the bottom of the ladder of provision to provide for the children who have been consigned to the scrap heap of the state education system. The increased interest among private schools at the top end of the fee spectrum in India to provide a number of places for children from economic disadvantaged backgrounds has become a matter of public interest and with research showing that there was some potential gain to such children from such provision (Day, 2005).

There is little information on the extent of private cost being borne by the poorer sections of the population who access the public education system but directly and/or indirectly bear the costs through charges such as tuition fees, uniform and textbook costs. The private sector in primary education comprises a number of distinct providers with very differential resources, In addition to the established private schools that cater for the well off middle classes who have opted out of the public system of education there are the private organisations that operate religious establishments such as church schools, madrasahs, Buddhist schools and Hindu schools (Fennell, 2006). This heterogeneous group of providers in the private sector share only one common characteristic, that they are regarded as alternatives to the government school (Pritchett, 2004).

If the rising number of non-state initiatives to provide education is a response to the inadequacy or absence of state provision of education it might be surmised that the greater activity would be in areas where the lack of education is most evident. The non-state programmes that work with the government have had mixed experiences of the effectiveness and/or sustainability of such engagement and often regard such linkages as a necessary but unpleasant requirement of their work. The reluctance of the state to relinquish its control over education provision and to give way to non-state providers is regarded as a major stumbling block. In particular, the state controlled curriculum has been the subject of much heated debate in the last few decades with fierce and extreme exchanges on issues such as the teaching and curriculum of history, and the privileging of English as the language of instruction. At the other end, non-governmental non-profit approaches that have chosen to work with non-formal education do not often engage with the state education system.

The manner in which non-state and state initiatives have operated in relation to each other provides a starting point to identify the economic and political strands emerging in the provision of education in India. In particular, it would be interesting to explore whether these two types of initiatives have facilitated a move towards mutual recognition or whether the non-state and state initiatives have operated without regular or consistent regard to the others' presence. The implications of the interaction between these two types of providers is the subject of the next section.

5. Forging partnerships or forcing change?

The increased presence of non-state provision of education in many states in India could be regarded as a response to a relatively conservative education sector programme and/or the government with a low capacity to ensure an acceptable delivery of education. On the other hand, the rapid entry of non-state organisations, some of which are set up by professionals and others drawing on corporate profits in the business world could be regarded as a sign of greater engagement between the state and non-state sector. The responsiveness of non-governmental non-profit organisations to shoulder the task of bringing in deprived and underprivileged children into primary education is heartening. In recent years there have been radical initiatives of multi-partner engagements in education to bring about improvements in the quality of schooling by drawing on the different core competencies of various

providers to work towards programmes that emphasise for example the importance of innovative textbooks and teaching tools to create and support an environment of in service training.^{vii} Mapping the interventions of non-State providers in governmental schools has provided considerable insights into the nature of State and non-state interactions (Kumar & Sarangapani 2005). The greater willingness on the part of state education system could be viewed as a move to a multi-provider approach in education. Is it the case in India that the educational objectives of the state have shifted discernibly to a more inclusive and multi-sectoral strategy of educational provision for state and non-state providers?

The first wave of programmes

The Hoshangabad Science Teaching programme (HSTP) was introduced in 1973 in Hoshangabad district, Madhya Pradesh within participating government schools. In the three decades of its existence it covered over a thousand schools and was regarded as an innovative approach to the teaching of science. The sudden closure of this first and most durable non-State initiative in education in 2002 based on an external evaluation that its results at the Standard X level were not of an adequate standards triggered questions about the nature of state and non-state engagement in the provision of education. The government report that advocated the closure of the programme stated that "To put it starkly, Eklavya as a Non-Governmental Organisation are 'tenants' in a very small part of the government's public schooling system. Therefore their prescriptions for change based on the small sample would have limited empirical validity for the larger system even if, unlike the data presented here, its performance was outstanding. The issue of illegitimacy of space that Eklavya has occupied in government schools though historical is now an issue that would be dangerous to leave unsettled" (Menon, 2002).

The use of the term 'tenant' to describe the relationship between the state educational system and the curriculum provided by a long-established NGO indicates that the state regarded the NGO not as an equal but a lesser entity in the provision of education. The claim that the private provider is somehow illegitimate in the public system of education provision further undermines the position of the NGO. There is an element of coercion in forcing the provider out of the educational sector that points to the limitations of a market based system of provision as it does not question the exit phenomenon, in this case the 2002 closure of HSTP. The idea that there is a positive aura of direct competition between the public and the private providers in Madhya Pradesh is negated by the fact that the language of tenancy is manifestly political and the voice of HSTP was summarily silenced in the political representation by the closure of 2002. The focus on the difficulty of 'scaling up' as a serious stumbling block for non-state providers and the inability of the state to acknowledge the academic innovations introduced by the HSTP in the area of curriculum and pedagogy indicates that the engagements between state and non-state providers have been restricted due to the low regard in

which non-state providers are held. The particular manner in which the closure occurred is indicative of the shrinkage in space for civil society initiatives in the educational sector by the *Ekalavya* teachers who were part of the HSTP (Balagaopal 2003, p. 101). The difficulty faced by this non-state organisation in working with the state is not unique and many non-state providers have chosen to work outside the state sector.

Alternative Schools

There has been a growing trend for alternative schools since the early 1990s. This is particularly seen to be the case where non-state providers are working with children who have been excluded from the state education system. The indirect financial costs imposed by the state schooling system, such as uniforms and extra private tuition, are one major cause of exclusion of children from poor communities. Another related cause is the expulsion of children from education due to their inability to meet the demands of accreditation imposed by the State sector. Organisations working in this arena typically operate unrecognised, unaided private schools for the most underprivileged groups of children such as slum-dwellers (De Dreze, 1999). These schools that have been forced out of the State system seem to be lower in status and financial ability than government schools and cannot absorb all the costs that the state authorities require as prerequisites to authorise and accredit the school.

The difficulty of working with the State has resulted in many NGOs going it alone with educational provision. Among the NGOs who work outside the state purview are those that have opted or been pushed outside the State sector on account of a variety of very different circumstances. Alternative approaches to education that has been advocated by organisations such as *Katha* have provided child-centred approach to learning^{viii}.

These schools have voted with their feet, choosing not to engage with the State educational system but make considerable use of voice from within the community space and strongly identify with the community approach to education corresponding to the south western corner (Case 3) of Table 1.

In Delhi, the communities that these NGOs work with are among the most under-privileged and operate largely in newer slums and in resettlement colonies. Mr. T. K. Matthew of the organisation, *Deepalaya* was particularly impassioned about the fact that the parents of these households cannot afford even the 'fees of the government schools'. This apparent contradiction in terms was clarified when he explained that the cost of uniforms, books and other sundries added up to some Rs300-400, if not more and that these could not be sustained by families in these areas of Delhi^{ix}. The alternative schools that are non-recognised, non-government private schools have an uphill and losing battle with the state authorities to obtain any additional resources. It appears to be a vicious circle, with the state authorities demanding additional payments, in terms of greater teachers' salaries, better teacher-student ratios and the like as preconditions for recognition. These schools

would only meet such costs by raising fees, which would push out the very families they worked with, or subsidies for the state that they cannot access without government recognition. As these schools largely admit children who have been forced out of the government system on account of costs, or more often repeated failure and compartment results in the government schools, this unsustainable position is particularly worrying. These schools have little or no voice and are excluded from engaging with the State placing them in the southeast corner (Case 4) of Table 1.

New initiatives

It is clear that there are considerable differences in the access that individual NGOs have to the official sphere, partially determined by the particular ideologies and communities that they work with but also considerably dependent on the local environment within which they operate. The work of an NGO such as *Pratham* has been applauded at the national and international level for improving the educational performance of pre-school children from disadvantaged areas, through *balwadi* and *balsakhi* programmes and improving retention by providing bridge classes. The *Pratham* philosophy is that of providing the first step towards the educational ladder. The organisation does not see itself as an alternative to the state, but as a facilitator of education by sensitising pre-school children to the education process through socialisation and by reducing the problem of low retention by emphasising reading, writing and arithmetic at the bridge courses and summer camps. This approach is exemplified in their recent achievements such as a campaign to teach a child to read in a month using the educational tool of the *barakhadi* in 2003 culminating in a reading campaign leading up to the National Reading Day on the 8th of September 2003^x. The emphasis on a reading campaign and other focussed objectives indicates that the organisation does not see themselves as a complete provider of education but rather as a viaduct for improving access and retention. With such a vision it is not likely that organisations such as *Pratham* are going to be alternatives to the state. It might even be the case that there is very little desire to deliberately direct or work to creating an alternative provider to the state among civil society based NGOs^{xi}.

The Azim Premji Foundation, was set up as a not-for-profit organisation with funds from WIPRO, in 2001 with the objective of ensuring universal elementary education. It works with state governments to improve the learning in government schools using initiatives such as learning guarantee programme. The organisation began working with the state government of Karnataka and has now extended its operation to other states in India (Giridhar et. al., 2006)^{xii}. Key to the work of the foundation is its commitment to working with the existing government network of schools to strengthen the existing provision.

These successes created by these organisations have become the basis for a roll out of programmes to states with a lower educational achievement. The Azim Premji foundation took its learning guarantee programme to Uttaranchal and Pratham opened a chapter in Bihar. The ability of these new providers to operate in states with a low enrolment rate and poor educational achievement,

on account of a low level of democratic politics might be regarded as a challenge to state provision (Lopez et al. 1999). On the other hand, the invitation that state governments in India are offering these new providers could be regarded as a new mode of intervention. Is this auxiliary support to the government indication of a new expansion of educational coverage through district level educational programmes? The move from supply side arguments to demand led solutions was based on the neo-liberal agendas of international organisations in the early 1990s broadly termed the Washington Consensus. It could be argued that in line with such thinking and the major changes wrought by the last two decades of economic liberalisation in India there has been a concomitant shift towards a more transparent based market based provision of education in India.

The 1990s have seen the establishment of a number of important milestones in the policy terrain that have had a marked impact of the educational system. These shifts in educational provision provide new opportunities to increase educational access to disadvantaged groups. However, in communities where inequity rather than fair play is the rule of the game, the odds are heavily weighted against the less privileged, and marginal groups in society and non-state providers face serious challenges. The pursuit of educational expansion without any regard for its implications for voice and entry could result in yet another category of exclusion, where social inequities would militate against the education of children from socially oppressed communities.

6. Conclusion

The current providers of education in India indicate that there has been a shift in the manner in which education is conceptualised. The market based approach has regarded parents and communities as purchasers of a commodity. The new models of education provision seem to regard strengthening of existing patterns of supply and demand as a sufficient basis for education. There is little attempt to address social inequities that might skew the costs imposed on poor families. The ability to access an education system is limited by hierarchical social structures. The use of voice requires political legitimacy otherwise it reproduces and reifies existing differentiation.

Conceptualizing educational provision as a phenomenon that operates through exit emphasises the competitive-price based approach while a community based understanding of educational provision would highlight the benefit of voice and the need for negotiated, local solutions. The first approach is close to the PFI approach in operation in the United Kingdom and the second closely relates to the Charter schools movement in the United States. It is difficult to discern the nature of conceptual thinking that is currently in place in India. The political demands made by the state on non-state providers attenuate their presence and their rights sometimes through a simultaneous denial of exit and voice. It might even be seen as a denial of entry into the educational sphere in extreme cases placing such providers in the category of excluded groups in table 1. Such a despondent view of the engagement between state and non-state providers seems unacceptable in the face of the recent

attention drawn to the improvements in the quality of schooling that can be built into the emerging partnerships by drawing on the different core competencies of various providers.

On the other hand, institutional learning has not been the forte of national educational institutions and the tendency is to regard local success as a curiosity and without the power to ensure social transformation. This 'drop in the ocean' attitude to success in the non-governmental sector has prevented any serious or sustained engagement beyond the duration of a particular project. The recent emergence of partnerships where the non-governmental sector sees its objective as jointly working with the government education system indicates that there might be a new opportunity to fashion longer lasting linkages that could improve network effects in educational provision. For this possibility to fructify it would be necessary to examine how the changing developmental objectives of the State have affected its consideration of non-state educational provision. It is hasty to draw on models such as PFI and Charter Schools without an explicit evaluation of the manner in which the state regards the current contributions of both NGOs and corporate players in the educational sector.

This new and much needed emphasis on key role of teachers and teaching in relation to bringing together the objectives of access and retention also provides an innovative solution to the intransigence of teacher union lobbies that have been highlighted in public school systems. It would appear that the current trend of an expanding role for the non-state sector indicates that there is now a more ready acceptance of the relative strengths of non-state providers by the state. It would seem that the State makes ready use of the language of the market to suits its political aims but is not always willing to ensure political voice to either consumers or providers of education. Current initiatives where there has been the entry of corporate or other non-state players might seem a more attractive solution to expanding the educational net but these are likely to come unstuck in the face of stark social inequities and there is need to recognise the pivotal role of the teacher in drawing on innovative pedagogy and curriculum to realise the social transformative function of education.

ⁱ The current debate on the expansion of Indian Institutes of Management both within India and overseas is a case in point.

ⁱⁱ The spread of the charter school movement through districts can be regarded as a achievement of voice.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jalan, Jyotsna and Elena Glinskaya. 2003. Improving Primary School Education in India: An impact assessment of DPEP-Phase I.

^{iv} Duflo, E.,2003. Scaling up and Evaluation. At http://econ-www.mit.edu/faculty/download_pdf.php?id=760-

^v Ms. Vrinda Sarup. Asia 2015 conference.

^{vi} Interviews with the Minister for Human Resource Development, Summer 2002

^{vii} Azim Premji Foundation. 2005. Report on National Conference on teachers.

^{viii} I would like to thank Ms. Geeta Dharmarajan for showing me around the Katha school and sharing their philosophy

^{ix} Deepalaya is one outstanding example of such an organisation providing schools for the worse off sections in Delhi's slums. I would like to thank Mr. T. K Matthew for taking the time to speak to me and show me around the school.

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^{xi} I am grateful to Amartya Sen for pointing out that the work of the *Pratichi Trust* in West Bengal created a civil society initiative to bolster the efficiency and management of the government school system.

^{xii} Giridhar, S., D. D. Karpody and Umashanker Periodi, 2006. Assessment Reforms through voluntary participation of schools: Experiences from Learning Guarantee Scheme. Azim Premji Foundation.

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