

CHAPTER I

A GLIMPSE OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN INDIA

Expansion of primary education through democratic and decentralized methods have been the principal concern of social welfare administration. The lexicon meaning of social welfare administration varies from country to country reflecting the historical development, evolution of administrative organization and socio-culture frame work. Out of all those indicators, the principal indicator has been primary education. Primary Education or elementary education has been the major thrust area. Social welfare signifies the attempts made by governments and voluntary organizations to help families and individuals by maintaining incomes at an acceptable level by empowering them through basic education. The concept of social welfare has been made restricted to the provision of services individual and families who find difficult or impossible to maintain themselves by way of food, shelter, clothing & education. Social welfare has also been identified with improvement of conditions of both mental and material aspects of life.

Education is at the centre of human development which is at the central place of any viable strategy for suitable economic or sustainable social development. Several other social problems like high fertility rates, lack of health care, ignorance and poverty would become more unmanageable with universal literacy. With this perception India had taken every possible necessary steps to achieve total literacy. The primary education system was to achieve universal access, universal participation, and universal achievement of minimum needs of learning by all children of school going age. The strategy also laid emphasis on special attention to women and disadvantaged sections of society. UNESCO had acknowledged the efforts by awarding India the literacy prize two years in a row to Kerala and West Bengal.

Education, had been the responsibility of individual philanthropist religious organizations, and voluntary agencies in the past and the State has intervened to supplement their efforts at every stage. Even now the educational institutions sponsored and supported by Private Sector out number those set up which are managed by the government. The investment in higher education - colleges and universities - has been large in proportion to the requirements of primary and adult education. This imbal-

ance needs to be rectified. Indian masses are still steeped in illiteracy. The percentage of literates is 65.38 per cent in 2001⁽¹⁾. The efforts to make literate are therefore required to be intensified.

The government of India formulated the National Policy on Education in 1986 to achieve the goal of universal primary education for all children up to 14 years of age - a goal enshrined in our Constitution as one of the Directive Principles of State Policy, to reorient the contents and process of education at all levels, to raise its standard and to make education a key instrument of social transformation, modernization and economic growth as well as a powerful tool for inculcating social, moral and cultural values. The National Policy on Education further enjoins upon the entire nation to pledge itself to the eradication of illiteracy particularly in the 15 to 35 age group. It also aims at making programme of literacy meaningful by combining it with peaceful information and skills relevant to the day-to-day needs of the learners. The policy also provides for various concessions and facilities for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, backward classes and other weaker sections of society including women in enabling them to acquire education. It is hoped that these objectives ambitious through they look, would be realized, given the strong political will, community support and international cooperation.

Since social welfare administration is the process of transforming community resources into a programme of community service in accordance with goal, policies and standards which have been agreed by those involved in the enterprise, education as a part of social welfare administration entails a larger canvas transcending both individual and family and answers basis enlightenment for all over space and time. Social welfare administration is primarily concerned with social problems, social service, social security social work as well as social policy. All these areas must have to be dealt with in a greater canvas of social education. Thus, educational administration as an off shoot of social welfare administration entails multidimensional structures to achieve the most fundamental objective of social enlightenment. These structures are welfare oriented political structure both at the centre and state level; voluntary agencies; international social welfare organization, financial administrative structure; personnel management structure; public relations related agencies and democratic decentralized peoples participatory structures, organization, management and research wing and POSDORB based management structure. Thus as branch of public admin-

istration, social welfare administration concerns with the administration of social services such as education, health, food and shelter. Finally, education has been the central core of welfare administration recognizing the fact that every welfare effort of the government will be jeopardised if people are not endowed and empowered with fundamental elementary education.⁽²⁾

In his famous speech in India's 'tryst with destiny', on the eve of independence in August 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru reminded the country that the task ahead included 'the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity'. Some achievements have indeed been made in these general areas, including the elimination of substantial famines, fairly successful functioning of our multiparty democratic system, and the emergence of a very large and quite successful scientific community - achievements that compares favorable with what has happened in many other parts of the world. However, it is not hard to see that much of the task that Nehru had identified remains largely unaccomplished, and that we have fallen quite far behind the best performers.

Nehru's list of tasks that India is well worth remembering in taking stock of where we are, and more particularly where we are not. As Nehru pointed out, the elimination of ignorance, of illiteracy of remediable poverty, of preventable disease, and of needless inequalities in opportunities must be seen as objectives that are valued for their own sake. They expand our freedom to lead the lives we have reason to value, and these elementary capabilities are of importance on their own. While they can and do contribute to economic growth and to other usual measures of economic performance, their value does not lie only in these instrumental contributions. Economic growth is, of course, important but it is valuable precisely because it helps to eradicate privation and to improve the capabilities and the quality of life of ordinary people. The first and the most important aspect of Nehru's listing of what we have to do is to make clear that the elimination of illiteracy, ill-health and other avoidable deprivations are valuable for their own sake - they are 'the tasks' that we face.

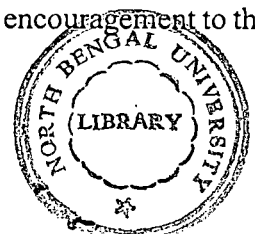
The issue of intrinsic importance is an appropriate starting point. Because we must assert first things first, but our analysis cannot, of course, stop at basic issues only. Something that is of intrinsic importance can in addition, also be instrumentally momentous, without compromising its intrinsic value. Basic education, good health

and other human attainments are not only directly valuable as constituent elements of our basic capabilities, these capabilities can also help in generating economic success of a mere standard kind, which in turn can contribute to enhancing the quality of human life even more. Many of the ingredients of good quality of life including instrumental roles in making us more productive and helping us to generate more outputs and incomes.⁽³⁾

In view of the remarkable expansion of higher education in India (we send about six times as many people to the universities and other higher educational establishments as China does, relative to its population), it is extraordinary how little we have progressed in basic education. Professor Amartya Sen argues that there have been deep - seated class base pressures that have determined Indian educational priorities, and that the inequalities in education are, in fact, a reflection of inequalities of economic and social powers of different groups in India. The educational inequalities both reflect and help to sustain social disparities and for a real break, much more determined political action would be needed than has been provided so far by either those in officers, or by the parties that have led the opposition. The weakness, in this field, of even parties of the 'left' is particularly striking, given the fact that elementary education has been one of the few really solid achievements of the countries led by communist parties - in places as diverse as China, Cuba and Vietnam and Russia.

The traditionally dominant tendencies of the ruling cultural and religious traditions in India may have been added to the political problem here. Both Hinduism and Islam have, in different ways, had considerable inclination towards religious elitism, with realization respectively on Brahmin priests movements against each (the medieval poet Kabir fought against both simultaneously), the elitist hold is quite strong in both these religions. This contrasts with the moral egalitarian and populist traditions of say, Buddhism. Indeed, Buddhist countries have typically had much higher levels of basic literacy than societies dominated by Hinduism or Islam. Thailand, Sri Lanka and Myanmar (Burma) are good examples. There is even some evidence that when western imperialists concurred countries in Asia and Africa, they tended to expand rather than counteract - the biases that had already existed in the local cultures. For example, the British in India took little interest in elementary education, but were quite keen on creating institutions of higher learning in the good, old Brahminical mode, whereas the same British in Buddhist Burma gave much encouragement to the

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expansion of elementary teaching, even though they tended to do rather little for higher education.

The point of this passing though is not to argue that India must remain imprisoned by its past, but only to indicate the necessity of explicitly addressing the questions of both ancient and modern biases that shape India as educational polity - reflecting prejudices of divisions as well as of traditional cultures. The difficulty in getting even 'left-wing' parties interested in combating inequalities in education relates to the general social atmosphere in India (including the nature of the leadership of the different parties) which takes some major disparities as simple 'given' and not particularly worth rating against (in view of other - perceived to be more 'pressing' - challenges). There is, however, some encouraging information in the remarkable heterogeneities that characterizes India in the field of elementary education. Advances of basic education have often come from forces that have railed against traditional politics (including protests against the historical hold of cast practices), or against traditional cultures (some in the form of missionary activities). While the latter may explain the higher achievements in elementary education in, say Goa or Mizoram, Kerala has had the benefit of both types of breaks (education - oriented lower - class movements as well as missionary activities), in addition to the good fortune of having royal families in Travancore and Cochin that happened to be atypically in favour of elementary education.

In drawing policy lessons from Kerala's experience of public action, note must be taken of two particularly instructive features. First, a real difference has been made by political activism in the direction of educational expansion for the lower-caste - and lower class - groups. In the general picture of political apathy towards elementary education that is characteristic of much of India, Kerala is a big exception, and the results vindicate the attention that has been pointed to this. There is, thus, much evidence here of the importance of political leadership and initiative and of popular involvement in making a real difference in the realization of basic capabilities of the people at large. The lessons to draw are of relevance not only for policy makers and policy holders in office, but also for opposition parties and the politically - conscious public at large.

Second, the historical heterogeneity within Kerala itself is also quite instructive. When the state of Kerala was created in independent India, it was made up, on

linguistic grounds, of the erstwhile native states of Travancore and Cochin, and the region of Malabar from the old province of Madras in British India (What is now mostly Tamil Nadu). The Malabar region, transferred from the Raj, was very much being Travancore and Cochin in social development (including literacy and life expectancy - and mortality rates generally). But by the eighties, Malabar had so much 'caught up' with the rest of Kerala that it could not large be seen in divergent terms. The initiatives that the state governments of Kerala took, under different 'managements' (led by the Communist Party as well as by the Congress), succeeded in transforming Malabar into being basically at par with the rest of Kerala. Since Kerala has had a rather special history, is important to note that much depends not be imprisoned in the fixity of history, and much depends on what is done here and now. In this too Kerala itself offers a lesson for the rest of India on what can be done by determined public action, even without having the favorable historical circumstances of Travancore and Cochin.

Table 1. Literacy and Scholarship : India (1987-88)

				India	Kerala	UP
I.	Rural literacy rate (Children 10-14)					
	Males	-	-	73	98	68
	Females	-	-	52	98	39
II.	Percentage of rural children attending school					
Age 5-9 :	Males	-	-	52	87	45
	Females	-	-	40	83	28
Age 10-14 :	Males	-	-	66	93	64
	Females	-	-	42	91	31
III.	Percentage of Children 12-14 ever enrolled					
Rural :	Males	-	-	74	100	73
	Females	-	-	49	98	32
Urban	Males	-	-	89	100	81
	Females	-	-	81	99	61

Source : Based on Census National Sample Survey Data.

The heterogeneity within India is illustrated and empowered in Table 1 which gives information on the literacy rates of rural children in India as a whole and in the

two states of Kerala and Uttar Pradesh. It turns out that while nearly all the children in the age group of 10 to 14 years are literate in Kerala, one - third of the UP male children and more than three-fifths of the UP female children of that age group are clearly illiterate. The picture is similarly applicable for India and even more so far U.P.

Evidently, in rural India in the age group of 12 to 14 years, more than a quarter of the boys never enrolled in any school and more than half of the boys never been enrolled either. As expected in Kerala nearly all the boys and girls of this age group have had some schooling and on the other side, in Uttar Pradesh the percentage of rural children of this age group have been totally a mess. In fact more than two-thirds of the UP girls between 12 and 14 have never had the benefit of any schooling at all. This is an appalling picture of neglect of basic education, and shows how very backward the bulk of India is - in terms of an important element of 'the tasks' that Nehru identified in 1947 - and furthermore, now abysmal the failure is in India's largest state. With more than 140 million people, had Uttar Pradesh been a country, on its own, it would have been one of the largest countries in the world and would have been - or close to being - the lowest terms of school education in the entire world.

Table 2. Adult Literacy rates, 1990 : Developing Countries

	Total	Female
India ^a - - - - -	52	39
China - - - - -	78	68
Average of low-income countries		
excluding China & India - -	55	44
Zimbabwe - - - - -	67	60
Botswana - - - - -	74	65
Kenya - - - - -	69	58
Nigeria - - - - -	51	39
Ghana - - - - -	60	51

Note : a Age 7+, 1999

Source : *World Development Report, 1994*

Indeed, in the field of elementary education India is not only behind China or Sri Lanka or South Korea, but also worse than the average of 'low income countries, the comparative data for which are given in Table 2. Even in comparison with sub-

Saharan Africa - perhaps the most problematic region in the world now with its record of recurrent famines - India does not shine. While it just about matches the literacy rates of Nigeria, it falls well behind the achievements of many of the African states, including Botswana, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Ghana (Table 2.) If India's relative performance is 'meddling' in many fields of economic and social development, its record is far below that - close to the very bottom - in the fields of literacy and elementary education.⁽⁴⁾

While education and development of human ability and skill must not be valued only as instruments to other ends, their instrumental importance must also be acknowledged. In the analysis of 'growth-mediated' social growth (through expensing the opportunities of economic expansion) and favoured by economic growth (through generating more resources for such support). The economic role of education, learning by doing technical progress, and even economics of scale can all be seen as contributing - in different ways - to the centrally directed human agency in generating economic expansion. Recent work on economic growth has brought out sharply the role of labour, education, and experiences and the so called 'human capital'. This has helped to fill the large gap identified as a 'residual' in the basic neoclassical to bring out the function of direct human agency in economic growth over and above the contribution made through the accumulation of physical capital. Our attempts to learn from the experiences of 'the east Asian miracle' and other cases of growth-mediated progress cannot ignore the wealth of insights that the recent theoretical and empirical analysis have provided.

The crucial role of education and skill makes it all more essential to pay attention to public policy to expand basic education and to promote skill formation. The role of widespread basic education has been quite crucial in countries that have successfully grown fast making excellent use of world markets; for example, the so-called four 'tiger' in East Asia (namely South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan) and more recently, China and also Thailand. The modern industries in which these countries have particularly excelled demand many basic skills for which elementary education is essential and secondary education most helpful while some studies have emphasized the productive contribution of learning by doing and on-the-job training, rather than the direct impact of formal education, the ability to achieve such training and learning is certainly helped greatly by basic education in schools

prior to taking up jobs. In the context of learning from the experiences of the fast growing economies of East Asia, it is important to recognize that all these countries- South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and post-reform china-had enormously higher levels of elementary education at the time they went for fast economic growth and greater integration with the world economy. The point is not that these countries have a much higher base of elementary education now than India currently has, but that they already had radically higher levels of elementary education in the nineteen seventies, when they went rapidly ahead, compared with what India has now.

There has been an astonishing failure of adequate public action in expanding elementary and secondary education in India. While "too much" government has been identified, with some plausibility, as a problem of past policies in India, in fact in the field of basic education (and also those of elementary health care, land reforms, and social security), 'too little' government action -rather than 'too-much' - has been the basic problem. The social opportunities offered by market- based economic growth, particularly of integration with modern world market, are severely limited when a very large part of the community cannot read or write, cannot follow printed or hand-written instruction, cannot cope easily with contemporary technology, and so on. The objective of integration with the world market-important as it is-is deeply hampered by India's unusually low level of basic educational development. The inequality in Indian educational policies and achievements, thus translates into inequalities in making use of new economic opportunities. The distributive failure supplements the effect of educational backwardness in restricting the over all scale of expansion of employment-generating modern production.

The persistence of endemic illiteracy and educational backwardness in India has many adverse effects. It limits, in general, the freedom and well-being of the India masses, and has a direct role in the relative deprivation of women in particular. It sustains high levels of mortality and fertility rates. It contributes to the comparative lack of pressure for social change, and to the moderateness of political demand and pressure for effective public attention in such fields as health care. But in addition, the lack of elementary education also makes the goals of economic expansion very much harder to realize. We have to face here two quite distinct but interrelated problems that limit the attainment and use of economic growth. First elementary education is

extremely important for successful integration with the world market. The nature and range of the commodities sold by, say, South Korea since the seventies or China from the eighties bring out clearly how crucial basic education is for catering to the world market, with production to specification and reliable quality control. Second, the wider the coverage of the population that takes part in the integration with the world market, the more 'participatory' the process of the growth would tend to be, raising the income-earning power of large parts of the nation. Even than India were to grow very fast with its highly technical industries (making use of special skills that India has cultivated and drawing on the trained middle class labour force), such as modern computer software or engineering products, the bulk of the Indians may still receive little reward from it.⁽⁵⁾

Planning and Implementation of Education through Decentralisation

Discussions made above lead us to the fact that a concerted programme of action for operationalising the principle of universalisation of elementary education through decentralised planning has been a crying need. Like other developing countries, India has been straggling hard to adopt a nature of economy having "neither here nor there" connotation in the midst of liberalisation and globalisation impact. The statist perspective of Indian state has been accommodating changes and challenges geared out of world wide trend of liberalisation. Despite the fact, states in India has still been the major actor to translate the general welfare and basic development policies. However, private sectors are also encouraged to join hands with the state in materialising the basic development programmes. The Indian state still continues to play the most dominant role both interms of planning and financing of major development activities. Indian's development experience suggests that ever since India's independence, planning decisions were almost centralised. This is certainly a kind of imperial hang over which our national planners had to succumb to. However, even when planning decisions were almost centralised, many programmes had decentralised implementation procedures. In the subsequent years, there was an earnest effort to develop planning machinery and mechanism at the state levels. In fact, a three tier system of panchayat raj institutions based on the Balwant Ray Committee recommendations was visualised to facilitate developmental efforts. In 1969 the Planning Commission issued guidelines for preparation of district plans. Realising that planning machinery and competency were not developed at the district level, efforts were redi-

rected to strengthen state level planning process. In the early eighties a Working Group under the Chairmanship of Professor Hanumantha Rao was constituted to develop guidelines for district plans. Based on the recommendations of this committee, the seventh five year plan adopted decentralised planning as one of the major strategies to achieve plan targets. With the recent constitutional amendment, the panchayat raj institutions are going to play an important role in shaping the local level development efforts.

Efforts to decentralise planning and management of education in India needs to be seen in this broader context of decentralisation taking place in the country. Education in India continues to be an area dominantly funded and managed by the public authorities. While policies are formulated at the national level, educational plans are developed at the state and district levels. Upto the mid-seventies, education continued to be an area of state subject. Although education is a concurrent subject at present, for all practical purposes, the development in this sector depends on the initiatives by the state governments. From the late sixties onwards, educational plans became more targeted towards educationally backward regions and groups. In the late seventies it was realised that more than three fourths of the non-enrolled children are accounted by a few selected states and these states were categorised as educationally backward states. In the subsequent period, planning efforts were focused on these states. However, efforts to decentralise educational planning to the district levels continued even during this period. The Hanumanta Rao Committee clearly identified the purview of district planning as : i) elementary education ; ii) secondary education; and iii) polytechnics and industrial training institutes⁽⁶⁾.

Decentralised planning at the district level "is a kind of area based sub-state planning that arises from the need to supplement the national and state plans with a more detailed examination of the resources, problems and potential of local areas (i. e. districts), so that investment programmes more specifically tailored to the particular needs of each district could be evolved and implemented"⁽⁷⁾. The Working Group Report further elaborates that district planning implies evolving a development scenario at the district level based on (a) specific needs of the people; (b) growth potential of the area; and (c) budgetary allocations and resources available. The concept of decentralised district planning, as indicated in the Working Group Report is based on a multifold planning framework where the district is treated as a sub-state decision

making unit. The district plans have necessarily to be within the framework of national policies and state priorities. This link with other planning process to strengthen national developmental efforts by encouraging autonomy to the local units for preparing plans within the national confines.

Decentralisation is very often confused with deconcentration and delegation of powers. Deconcentration demarcates and assigns some duties to lower level planning units without power, authority and responsibility in planning. It is nothing but an administrative convenience whereby authority rests with higher level planning agencies and lower level units are depended upon for implementation of the plans. Deconcentration entails in creation of more number of administrative units at lower spatial units without actual power and authority in the formulation of plans. Delegation consists of granting of authority from a higher level planning unit to a lower planning unit for a specified period and that too, very often, in certain specified areas. In this case, lower level planning units are not acting according to their own rights but on the basis of power granted to them by the higher authority. In this sense the authority enjoyed by the lower level unit is treated as a derived concession rather than a statutory right. Therefore, delegation is nothing but a diffusion of authority in an administrative sense.

A plan is really decentralised when : i) the lower spatial unit of planning, say a district, is given authority to formulate its own targets and evolve strategies to achieve them. However, it is to be noted that the targets cannot be fixed totally independent of national concerns. Hence guidelines from central level planning agencies may become essential and helpful to fix targets at the district level. This guidelines need not necessarily adversely affect the autonomy of the districts. On the other hand, such guidelines help strengthening the multifold planning framework. Absence of such guidelines may lead to anarchy, individualism and parochialism which weakens national polity and multi-level planning framework; ii) the district is given power and authority to mobilise additional resources, if necessary, and reallocate the resources already allocated to it by the state and central government. This will entail a change in the present pattern of budgetary procedures. Formulation of own budgets by the district becomes very important; so also the idea of untied funds. In the initial phases, when the competencies and planning machinery are not well developed, the district may be given only limited authority so far as the allocation and mobilisation of resources are

concerned. However, they will be given these authorities on a wider scale with further advances in decentralisation; and iii) planning becomes decentralised when the district participates in the planning process with the higher level planning units, say state, on more equal terms. The authority of the district is not based on a derived concession but on the basis of the statutory power it enjoys. The districts do not subordinate to the state but works on a partnership basis based on the statutory power it enjoys.⁽⁸⁾

District as the Unit for Decentralised Planning

Educational planning in India, at present, has a multi-level frame work with planning efforts initiated and carried out at the national, state and district levels. One can see a process of evolution of planning efforts from top to bottom levels in an effort towards decentralisation. At the national level the Planning Commission and the Ministry of education provide the leadership and guidance to plan education. The Planning Commission develops five year and annual plans at the national level. At the state level education has a secretariat and a directorate. Secretariat is responsible for policy making and directorate is responsible for direction and regulation of activities. Over the years, all the states have developed planning cells at the state level. Although these planning cells are supposed to undertake the responsibility of developing educational plans, such efforts are rarely attempted with seriousness partly due to the lack of planning competencies at the state level.

District as a viable unit for planning was under discussion for fairly long period in India. Perhaps, Professor Gadgil is one of the first to advocate planning at the district level. Professors V.K.R.V. Rao and S. Chakravarty also considered district as a viable unit for planning. Professor K.N. Raj (1971) also agreed with choice of district as a viable unit for decentralised planing. However, it is to be noted that there were attempt to seek the possibilities and feasibilities of planning at the block level. Dantwala committee (1977) provided guidelines for block level planning. Professor Y.K. Alagh while agreeing with the choice of district as a viable unit for planning preferred a grouping of the economy into 10-12 blocks for planning purposes. The Economic Advisory Council (EAC) of the Prime Minister in its second report (1974) has recommended creation of 94 development divisions in the country for purposes of planning. Accordingly each division will consists of a cluster of districts with similar or identical agro-climatic conditions.

Choice of unit for planning depends upon the existing administrative structure and also the level of development of the planning machinery. Information-wise, the district is the ultimate reducible unit for which data collection machinery exists in the India. At this level, administrative structure is also fairly well developed. There is a collectorate at district level and below the state level collectorate is the most well developed administrative structure. More importantly, at district level we have relatively better trained or trainable staff who can undertake the responsibility of developing district plans. Block level may become a viable unit perhaps in the coming years when planning machinery and competency at the district level are well developed. But at present, at least in the majority of the instances, block is not a viable unit for decentralised planning in India.

As we have noted earlier, efforts to make planning effective at the district level were initiated in the sixties. The Planning Commission (1969) even issues guideline for district planning. The recent report of the Working Group (Planning Commission: 1984) is a restatement and re-affirmation of the fact that district is the viable unit for decentralised planning in India at the present level of development. Therefore, in the present context while one talks about decentralised planning one is taking about district level planning. According to the Working Group definition, district planning is seen as a sub-system in the multi-level planning framework. All planning activities at the district level will be with a single planning body at the district level. This body will be in line with Planning Boards at the state level and Planning Commission at the national level. The report stresses that the planning function will not be fragmented among numerous departments and agencies. In other words, planning at the district level will be integrated and it will dovetail with plans at the lower and higher spatial units. The working group report conceives the progress of district planning in three district stages: Stage-I initiating; Stage-II Limited Decentralisation; Stage-III Final stage representing full decentralisation. It is expected that stage I and II will be completed by the end of seventh plan and stage III will be achieved by the year 2000 A.D.

The developments in the field of education in terms of decentralisation are perhaps more positive. Following the Working Group Report the National Policy on Education (1986) and the Programme of action (1992) envisaged setting up of District Board of Education to facilitate educational planning at the district level.⁽⁹⁾ The

Working Group of Elementary Education set up in the context of the eighth five year plan (1992-1997) noted that there are educationally advanced districts in educationally backward states and there are educationally backward districts even in educationally advanced states. Hence, the Working Group argued for keeping district as the unit for developing realistic decentralised planning in education.⁽¹⁰⁾ The NDC Committee on literacy and elementary education (Planning Commission :1992a) and the eighth five year plan (Planning commission :1992b) categorised the districts for purposes of planning education into three : i) high literacy districts where enrolment is universal and retention rates are high and hence the emphasis need to be on quality improvement programmes; ii) Total Literacy Campaign districts where campaign has produced an increased demand for primary education and conditions are conducive to increase the pace of expansion of primary education ; and iii) low literacy districts where provision of facilities are poor, delivery mechanisms inadequate and community awareness at very low levels. The CAFE committee on decentralised management of education emphasised the need for integrating educational planning and management efforts with the panchayat raj institutions. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) is the most recent effort to translate the idea of decentralised planning into an operational practice.

District Primary Education Programmes is an effort to facilitate decentralised disaggregated target setting to make the plans local specific. These plans are prepared at the local level by people at the local level . The districts are given authority to fix their targets, evolve relevant strategies and resources are provided as per the projected requirements. The logic and the logistic of the programme show various efforts to develop planning competencies at the district level.⁽¹¹⁾

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