

The London School of Economics and Political Science

**Aligning Opportunities and Interests:
The Politics of Educational Reform in the
Indian States of Andhra Pradesh and
Bihar**

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the M.Phil/Ph.D. degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the role of politics in implementing educational reform in India during the period 1994 to 2011. Much of the recent research on politics and educational reform has been dominated by the analytical framework of formal political economy, but this framework has not been able to explain how reforms are successfully adopted. Also, the main focus has been on the negative role of politics, controlled by powerful interest groups and biased institutions, in constraining changes likely to benefit poor people. I focus instead on understanding the political dynamics in cases of success. In particular, why do political leaders and public officials support educational reform even though this does not suit their political calculations, and is likely to encounter resistance from teacher unions and educational bureaucracies? To understand these dynamics, I use the framework of comparative institutionalism, and examine the contested interaction of ideas, interests, and institutions, leading to success or failure.

To analyse the process of reform implementation, I have selected two Indian states—Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. Both were educationally backward at the beginning of the 1990s and were confronted with a common agenda for reform established by the federal government. However, they pursued divergent trajectories over the next decade, with the former state achieving higher levels and reduced disparities in primary school participation. I compare the political dynamics in three important arenas: the management of teacher interests and their unions, educational decentralisation, and the daily interactions between poor households, schools, and the local state.

I find that political strategies are important in determining variations in outcomes. In Andhra Pradesh, the political leadership found an alignment between the new opportunities provided by the federal government and its own agenda for development; it created new allies for change by reducing discretion in teacher policies, playing on inter-union rivalries, and creating a local cadre of party loyalists. However, a wider agenda of development was missing in Bihar, and even successfully designed school decentralisation policies could not be implemented due to weak support from political leaders, and because of local elite capture. In both the states, however, the interaction of the poor with schools and the local state was a process of struggle, indicative of the challenges that lie ahead.

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(Note: *These photographs have been taken by Mansi Midha and permission has been taken to reproduce them in this thesis)

Abbreviations

AIES	All India Education Survey
AP	Andhra Pradesh
APPEP	Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Programme
APSS	<i>Arajpatrit Prarambhik Shikshak Sangh</i>
APUS	Andhra Pradesh <i>Upadhyay Sangh</i>
AP-UTF	Andhra Pradesh United Teachers Federation
BPSC	Bihar Public Service Commission
BPSS	Bihar <i>Rajya Prathamik Shikshak Sangh</i>
BRC	Block Resource Centre
BEO	Block Education Officer
BEP	Bihar Education Programme
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BIMARU	North Indian states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh noted for their poor human development indicators
CABE	Central Advisory Board on Education
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CRC	Cluster Resource Centre
CSS	Centrally Sponsored Schemes
DEA	Department of Economic Affairs
DEO	District Education Officer
DSE	District Superintendent of Education

DfID	Department for International Development
DIET	District Institute of Educational Technology
DoE	Department of Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
DSE	District Superintendent of Education
DTF	Democratic Teachers Federation
EBS	Educationally Backward States
EC	European Commission
EFA	Education For All
GO	Government Order
GoAP	Government of Andhra Pradesh
GoB	Government of Bihar
GoI	Government of India
GTA	Government Teachers Association
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
IDA	International Development Association
INR/Rs	Indian National Rupees/Rupee(s)
JD (U)	Janata Dal (United)
MDM	Mid-Day Meal
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MEO	<i>Mandal</i> Education Officer
MoHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MRP	<i>Mandal</i> Resource Person
MPCE	Monthly Per Capita Expenditure
MVF	MV Foundation

NFE	Non-Formal Education
NCERT	National Council for Educational Research and Training
NIEPA	National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPE	National Policy on Education
NPNSE	National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education
NSS	National Sample Survey
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
OB	Operation Blackboard
OBCs	Other Backward Castes
ODA	Overseas Development Administration
PSM	<i>Panchayat Shiksha Mitra</i>
PROBE	Public Report on Basic Education
PRTU	<i>Panchayati Raj</i> Teachers Union
PWG	People's War Group
RJD	Rashtriya Janata Dal
SC	Scheduled Caste
SEC	School Education Committee
SSA	<i>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan</i>
ST	Scheduled Tribe
STU	State Teachers Union
TRTU	Telengana Rajya Teachers Union
TDP	Telugu Desam Party
TE	Teacher Education
VEC	Village Education Committee

VSS

Vidyalay Shiksha Samiti

WDR

World Development Report

Glossary

<i>Aam Sabha</i>	A general assembly of the village (Bihar)
<i>Arajpatrit Shikshak Sangh</i>	Non-gazetted Teachers Union
<i>Baraat</i>	A wedding procession from the bride-groom's side
<i>Berozgaar Shikshak Sangh</i>	Union of unemployed teachers (Bihar)
<i>Bhumihars</i>	One of the upper castes (Bihar)
<i>Charwaha Vidyalay</i>	Non-formal school for shepherds (Bihar)
<i>crore</i>	A unit of 10 million (10,000,000)
<i>Garib Raili</i>	A political march and gathering of the poor, organised by Lalu Prasad Yadav in Bihar
<i>Gram Panchayat</i>	Village council; the lowest tier of the <i>panchayat</i> system
<i>Jatra (Telugu)</i>	Local festival where statues of a deity are placed in a chariot and taken around
<i>Mandals</i>	The second tier of sub-district units in Andhra Pradesh, below the district and the sub-division
<i>Mid-Day Meals</i>	School lunch programme in India
<i>Mukhiya</i>	Head of the <i>Gram Panchayat</i> (Bihar)
<i>Panchayat Shiksha Mitras</i>	Para-teachers appointed on contract in Bihar
<i>Samvida Shikshaks</i>	Para-teachers appointed on contract in Madhya Pradesh
<i>Sarpanch</i>	Head of the <i>Gram Panchayat</i> , Andhra Pradesh
<i>Vidyalay Shiksha Samitis</i>	Elected school committees, Bihar
<i>Vidya volunteers</i>	Para-teachers appointed on contract in Andhra Pradesh

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Chapter 1

Introduction:

Understanding the “Missing” Politics in Educational Reform

1.1 Background and Motivation for this Research

This thesis investigates the role of politics in implementing educational reform in developing countries, specifically in India. Although it is commonly understood that reforms fail for political reasons, analysing the relationship between politics and educational reform has ranked low on the priority list of policymakers, implementers, and analysts. One reason why this relationship has not been adequately investigated is because of the predominant conceptualisation of reform being a rational design process, embodied in a technical plan, put together with the expertise of educational planners and economists, and viewed by them as independent of political interests. In such a conceptualisation, the implementation phase is seen merely as the unfolding of a plan by rule-bound, non-partisan administrators. Therefore, politics is not seen to feature prominently. Nonetheless, politics obviously is central to the reform process, because it is governments that formulate and launch reforms, and the importance of politics often becomes visible in the implementation process when political factors are blamed for lack of progress. As a result, there is something of a paradox—where technical planners and analysts ignore politics when designing reforms, yet the execution phase is apparently bedevilled by political constraints.

In the small body of research that does address the relationship between educational reform and politics, the dominant approach is one inspired by the political economy framework rooted in the discipline of economics.¹ Also referred to as the “new” or “formal” political economy approach, it applies the tools of economic analysis to political

¹ The definition of political economy adopted here is borrowed from Merilee Grindle (2001) *In Quest of the Political: The Political Economy of Development Policymaking*. Here, she defines political economy as broadly referring to the “intersection of economics and politics in policy choice, and in policy and institutional change” (p. 347).

phenomenon.² In such an analysis, politics is seen in a negative way, mainly as a constraint or hurdle which needs to be overcome so that reforms can be implemented. The starting point of this approach is an assumption regarding human behaviour as being essentially self-interested, and self-interest being the expression of “rational” behaviour. In the formal political economy approach, politicians, public officials, and even states, are treated as self-interested actors. I highlight this by citing the arguments from some of the main theories and concepts within the framework of formal political economy. Public choice theory, for example, posits that politicians and public officials offer policy packages to remain in power, or to secure private rewards such as prestige and money. The principal-agent model posits that the problems in policy implementation occur due to self-interested actions of policymakers and implementers. Applying its line of reasoning, policymakers are like “principals” of a contract (that is, those who entrust an “agent” to perform certain tasks and compensate them financially for it), and service providers are like the “agents” (that is, those who execute the tasks/plans). Both the “principals” and “agents”, acting in their respective self-interest while they implement policies for citizens, can work against the interests of the latter. So what we see is a dilemma of sorts, where citizens pay for services through their taxes, but have no direct control over what they get. In the case of education, citizens pay taxes and elect their political representatives; politicians then delegate the provision of educational services to frontline service providers (primarily teachers) who they cannot oversee directly. This long “chain of accountability” is viewed as the heart of the problem, as it generates different incentives and accountability frameworks. Ultimately, citizens feel powerless and politicians respond only to more powerful interests in society, in this case the interests of teachers (World Bank 2003a p.78). In such a framework, public officials, whether elected or not, have no interest in introducing policy changes that favour the broader public interest. The suggested solution is one of changing the technical design of contracts—a measure which reinforces the understanding of policy reforms as one of technical design alone. The only part played by

² The “new political economy” rooted in economics goes back to Adam Smith and has been developed more recently in the work of Robert Bates, Dani Rodrik, Alberto Alesina, and Anne Krueger (Grindle 2001, p. 347). Developed primarily by economists, it encompasses the perspectives of public choice and social choice theories, and principal-agent models. The terms “new political economy” and “formal political economy” have been used interchangeably in the literature and also in this text.

politicians in this analytical reasoning, is that of protecting vested interests of powerful groups.

Society-centred explanations of politics, understood in terms of the working of groups and interests, underlie most of the arguments made above regarding the negative role of politics in educational reform, and of formal political economy's understanding of the policy process more generally.³ In this view, politics is the result of bargaining and competition among groups (which are made of self-interested actors). The groups form to protect special interests and lobby hard to achieve their ends. Changes brought about by educational reform affect these societal interests by awarding benefits to some and imposing costs on others. In this process, they create groups of winners and losers. Powerful groups are likely to organise and work collectively against reforms if the envisaged policy changes infringe on their power or interests. In education, teachers are a powerful interest group, and their unions have a strong voice in influencing government decisions. Changes brought about by reforms may entail additional work and new responsibilities for teachers. Further, these changes may also alter the conditions of work for teachers and stimulate concerns that penalties will be imposed on them for poor performance. Therefore, teachers are among the most important "cost-bearing" groups from new conditions of work, and their unions can launch collective action in order to resist change. On the other side, poor people are often the likely beneficiaries of change. And, in theory at least, they too can protect their interests by forming a lobby-group to demand better schools. However, the poor are usually too weak to organise themselves. So they cannot counter the power of unions and demand pro-poor changes. In this view, then, policy changes are beholden to the demands of organised social groups that can express a strong voice.⁴

³ "Society-centred" explanations of politics refer to the pluralist tradition in democratic political theory. The most famous and early exponent of this tradition is Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?* (1961). Dahl analysed the role of special interests in American politics. According to him, politics is the result of competition and bargaining of a plurality of groups in society.

⁴ These arguments draw upon Mancur Olson's *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965). See Coralles (1999) for a discussion of how winners and losers (among societal interests) are created while pursuing changes in education.

A second concept used in the formal political economy approach, is that of “rent-seeking”, developed by Anne Krueger in 1974.⁵ The concept has been used frequently to highlight the growth of material interests around specific policies, and the reason why policy change is resisted. Krueger uses the term to explain how individuals and groups (acting in their self-interest), take advantage of the political process, and extract rents to maximise economic gains, especially in situations where there is government control and regulation of the economy. This involves a misuse of state power and authority. In the provision of school education by the government, such behaviour refers to requests for payment by government agents for services that should have been available to the poor without price. Thus one is thinking of bribes taken by administrators for the exercise of their legal but discretionary authority. Examples of such (mis)use of authority in the relationship between educational administrators and teachers include: awarding discretionary benefits to teachers in promotions or favoured postings; imposing arbitrary penalties (for example, transfers to remote locations); and, in extreme cases, even suspension. Rents may also be imposed on poor parents by teachers and educational authorities (for example, through the illegal charging of fees for school facilities that should be free), practices that may extend to cover admission procedures, the issuance of transfer certificates, and school examinations.⁶ Powerful economic interests are often seen to develop around policies that are currently in operation, and arguments influenced by the political economy tradition would have us believe that it is these interests which provoke resistance to change. Apropos education, existing arrangements of service delivery have been seen as full of “rent-seeking” opportunities—practices that are likely to be altered in the process of reform (Devarajan and Shah 2004; Kingdon and Muzammil 2003). New policies would perhaps reduce or even abolish the benefits being reaped from current policies in unproductive and illegal ways. Thus political leaders, public officials, and even states, are likely to favour the status-quo as opposed to change.

⁵ The term was developed by Anne Krueger in her article “The Political Economy of the Rent-Seeking Society” (1974).

⁶ Vinoba Gautam, an Education Programme Officer with UNICEF, and associated with the Bihar Education Project since the mid-1990s, reported that there was a practice of teacher unions charging fees from students for exam papers that were given out annually in Champaran district in Bihar (Personal interview, UNICEF Patna office, Bihar, 6 October 2005).

Although this body of work (inspired by the formal political economy approach) has contributed significantly to our understanding of the incentives and institutions that block reforms, it has been unable to account for situations where they are implemented with success. Also, the vision of politics which lies at the core of such a theory remains essentially negative. That is, politics is seen as a constraint that needs to be overcome in order for educational reform to be successful. Grindle criticises this view of the policy process which predicts negative outcomes for society because political and policy actors follow their narrow, rational self-interests. She notes that although the “new political economy” approach has many strengths, its weakness lies in its assumption that “politics is a negative factor in attempting to get policies right” (Grindle 1989 p.9). As she says: “[e]ffective in identifying winners and losers, formal political economy is less able to provide insight into the factors that enhance or weaken the power of these interests, nor does it anticipate how outcomes are altered by the strategic choices of reform advocates” (Grindle 2004 p.12).

This research also engages critically with another strand of arguments made using the tenets of formal political economy. Conceptually, they rest on similar micro-foundations—the idea of politicians and policymakers as self-interested actors, of teacher unions that resist change, and of politics being an impediment for educational reform. Also, the fundamentals of society-centred explanations of politics, used in the earlier arguments, are reiterated here. However, where these arguments move beyond a static political economy framework, is in identifying the measures by which political constraints to reform can be overcome. The suggestions are for curtailing the power of unions and promoting decentralisation—technical solutions that have worked in instances of public sector reforms more generally. It is evident that these policy recommendations tend to be based on a more macro-level theorisation of the reform-politics relationship.

The starting point of this line of argument is a critique of the existing direction of educational policies towards centralised expansion. This is because expansion leads to an increase in the power of teacher unions (Kingdon and Muzammil 2003; Murillo 1999; World Bank 2008). Further, the focus of policies currently in operation (and which is the object of criticism here), is seen as being unduly inclined towards the expansion of

“access” in education.⁷ Building new schools, hiring extra teachers, and improving their salaries, are some of the favoured activities in this regard. All these measures focus only on the “supply-side”, and have potential opportunities for generating patronage and illegal profits. On purely rational considerations, while these policies were seen as appropriate in the early years of nation-building, and indeed found favour in many developing countries until the 1970s for this reason, their persistence now is seen as providing patronage opportunities for politicians, and something that greatly enhances the power of teacher unions. Further, their continued operation is seen as the reason behind “state failure” and “bad governance”, issues that have now become important in development policymaking. The “rent-seeking” behaviour of states and a “*dirigiste*” development process with a focus on centralised expansion are regarded as being responsible for these failures (Corbridge, Williams, Srivastav, and Veron 2005 pp. 151, 154–5). The recommended “technical” solution is to move from the current stress on centralised and supply-driven expansion to “bolstering the demand side” and decentralisation (Coralles 1999).⁸

Murillo (1999 pp. 33–4) notes that among international financial institutions providing support in the area of education, as also for governments that were reforming their educational services, there was a belief that this type of reform was the “plan that would solve many of the inefficiencies of educational systems” (in Latin America). She cites an Inter-American Development Bank study (1996 p. 257) in this context which states that “highly centralized administered systems are very poor at choosing the best mix of inputs, required in varied local conditions; they are also poor at adjusting to changing requirements over time”.⁹ According to this view, the flexibility of decentralisation allows discretion in policies of hiring, firing, and wage setting according to local conditions, and in curbing the power of teacher unions.

⁷ Education policies can be classified in two main categories—those oriented towards increasing access and those oriented towards increasing quality. Access oriented policies increase expenditure and concentrate on raising provisions, whereas quality improvement policies mainly enhance the efficiency of expenditure. Examples of the latter are measures aimed at improving learning quality and enhancing teacher accountability and performance.

⁸ Corrales (1999 pp. 5–6) notes that policies oriented towards increasing access seldom face political obstacles because both politicians and teacher unions are content with these policies. However, policies which aim at improving quality by measures for improving school efficiency and the accountability of teachers face very stiff political opposition. Augmenting the demand side through decentralisation and community participation helps to overcome the political impediments that strong vested interests pose to the policy reform process.

⁹ IADB 1996, cited by Murillo (1999 pp. 33–4).

By suggesting that promoting decentralisation and reducing the power of unions were the conditions under which reforms could be successful, these arguments were somewhat able to overcome criticisms regarding the inherent proclivity of the earlier approaches to over-predict “reform paralysis” (that is, explain only cases where reforms have been unsuccessful). Also, many countries were adopting measures for increasing teacher quality and accountability and for decentralisation in order to achieve both educational objectives and increased participation.¹⁰ This lent credence to the belief that formal political economy arguments were driving state policies for educational reform.

What I seek to question in this research is not the substantive merit of either of these proposals for improving schools. Rather, what I question is their presentation as mutually exclusive policies—of decentralisation pitted against the power of unions, or of self-interested teachers pitted against the interests of the community. In my view, the success of educational reform is not simply a zero-sum game of reducing the power of teachers and increasing the power of communities. Such a binary formulation misses key issues relating to the context and the process of reform—both of which provide opportunities in which political leaders and administrators can find room for manoeuvre, and thereby pursue policies in public interest.

1.2 Thesis Topic and Research Questions

My research on the reform-politics relationship addresses two questions. First, why do political leaders and public officials support educational reform even though the odds seem to be stacked against them? Second, what incentives do these actors find in implementing reforms, even though logical assumptions about their economic self-interest might lead us to believe that they would actually gain from blocking change?

In my view, politics is a process of contest and conflict where the context is important. In the analytical framework I employ, educational reform is not simply another

¹⁰ In their review of the politics of educational reform in the 1990s in six Latin American countries, Kaufman and Nelson (2004) note that decentralisation is the most important reform measure in each of the country cases they examine. The motivations for adopting decentralisation have varied, ranging from efforts to reduce central government expenditures, to greater concern for making the educational system more efficient and equitable (Kaufman and Nelson 2004 p.261).

arena for the pursuit of self-interest by politicians and public officials. Nor is political action simply “determined” by the influence of powerful interest groups. Contrary to the postulates of formal political economy, political leaders and administrators are often found to obtain room for manoeuvre, and implement changes even in the face of constraints (although naturally being subject to both the context and the process of change). Furthermore, I argue that the introduction of new reform policies can provide political opportunities for leaders and administrators to tide over existing constraints and so bring public policy closer to public interest. Such opportunities differ at the local and central levels, and also between the different actors (that is, politicians and administrators) engaged in the process of policy change. Therefore, any attempt to generalise and develop a theory from instances of successful reform implementation requires a carefully nuanced and grounded analysis for each of these levels and for the main actors involved.

Contesting the assumption that politics almost always represents a constraint on bringing about change, the primary hypothesis forwarded in this research is that politics can—and indeed often does—play a positive role in the successful implementation of educational reform. This hypothesis is tested by studying a case in a democratic political situation where efforts to bring about change have led to improved outcomes. This is then compared with a similar instance where the initiative for educational reform was taken, but progress on outcomes was limited. Politics is viewed here as an independent variable, and it is seen in terms of the working of interests, institutions, and the actions of political leaders and policymakers.

A second hypothesis proposed is that the actions of political leaders can overcome constraints to change posed by interests and institutions working in school education, and hence they can contribute to the success of educational reform. In other words, the issue is whether competitive politics itself provides the opportunity whereby vested interests and institutions can be challenged, manoeuvred, and even marginalised by political leaders. In analysing this second hypothesis, it is necessary to examine the role of non-elected policymakers—especially the so-called “policy entrepreneurs” among them, who are the champions of new policies, notwithstanding the institutional constraints that they are faced

with.¹¹ Finally, it is crucial to assess the relative importance of the “policy entrepreneur” and the political leader in overcoming obstacles to reform implementation. I argue that the actions of political leaders matter more than those of policymakers.

Educational reform in India allows us to explore these hypotheses, and the subsidiary questions listed above. It does so in a complex political and institutional setting, comprising a federal government and multiple state governments, many political parties at the Centre and in the states, varying local government settings within states, and states which themselves are at quite different levels of economic and educational development. Therefore, this thesis is an important contribution to the literature on understanding the relationship between politics and educational reform— literature which hitherto has largely been focused on Latin America.

1.3 Defining the Scope and Content of Educational Reform: Differing Analytical Perspectives

Before discussing the research questions in the context of India, it is useful to assess how educational reform has been characterised in the literature, and which type of initiative can be considered as constituting “educational reform”.

In many developing countries, educational reform has been carried out within a framework of economic reorganisation and restructuring—often referred to as “structural adjustment”—especially in the 1980s and 1990s. The economic reform agenda, around which there was considerable consensus at that time, included market liberalisation, privatisation, and measures to reduce public expenditure (for example, cuts in the number and salaries of civil servants, decreases in subsidies, and the imposition of user charges). Many “educational reforms” were driven by this agenda, initially to impose spending cuts, and later to reduce the stresses laid on human development by the structural adjustment process, where spending on primary education was often either protected or even

¹¹ Corrales (1999 p. 7) cites Wilson (1986 p. 440) as being one of the early users of the term “policy entrepreneurs”. They are policy-actors, usually at the cabinet level or with close links to the president, who find a way of pulling together a legislative majority on behalf of interests that are not well represented in government. Policy entrepreneurs “dramatize an issue, galvanize public opinion, and mobilize congressional support for policies that would not otherwise be approved”. The formulation of a successful policy proposal is the job of a policy entrepreneur.

increased. Hence, this wave of “reform” focused on how to reduce public spending on education, and subsequently, on how to protect “priority” sectors—such as primary education—that were considered to be important for the poor. Indeed, refocusing spending on primary education was in many ways considered a considerable reform intervention in itself since it often meant cutting back on funding for secondary and tertiary education.

In the influential volume *Education Reforms in the South in the 1990s*, which analyses concrete efforts for many developing countries, Lene Buchert (1998) sees reform as part of a broader strategy of reorganisation. He describes it as a “deliberate effort to move towards a different situation within the education system”. Overall, he states that reform needs to effect a “radical transformation of the education system, its sub-sectors, organization and functioning, if it is to support broader societal change” (Buchert 1998 p.14). External aid is involved in most cases, and there may be a considerable degree of external influence in setting the agenda for change. This is so even though many reforms involve considerable indigenous effort as well.

The importance of external aid in driving educational reform in developing countries has greatly influenced not only the strategies and programmes implemented, but also in defining reform and the analytical framework for thinking about the process. Among aid agencies, the World Bank has special significance because it has been involved in assisting educational reform all over the world. Indeed, by 1995 it was the single largest source of educational finance for low and middle income countries. Also, within the World Bank’s lending portfolio, education had the largest share—underlining the importance accorded to education lending within the Bank (World Bank 1995).

The World Bank played an important role in shaping thinking on educational reform. Psacharopoulos (1989 p. 180), one of its early principal proponents, defined education policy and reform as follows:

Education policy is perhaps the contemporary equivalent of what twenty years ago was known as educational planning. Whatever it is, and no matter how many other disguises it takes (such as ‘educational reform’), practically every country in the world has at one time or another proclaimed an intention or made a decision that would affect some aspect of schooling in society.

Psacharopoulos uses the terms “education policy” (known previously as educational planning) and “school reform” interchangeably. However, Riddell (1999) argues that equating school reform to policy and planning alone has been (and continues to be) a dominant way of defining reform, but only when seen from the viewpoint of specific disciplines. These points take us to the second set of issues which relate to the analytical complexities involved in understanding reform.

The definition of what constitutes reform has been affected by the “lens” or focus of the different disciplines that have shaped the content of change. A detailed analysis by Riddell (1999) suggests that there are three lenses which must be applied in understanding educational reform—the educational, the economic, and the political. Each presents a different agenda, with the boundaries of the respective disciplines constituting important impediments to the ways in which individual reforms have been understood. While in the past, educational reform was commonly described as a simple history put forward by an educational planner, this is not a comprehensive understanding. Riddell argues for the adoption of “varifocal” lenses across the three different disciplines. While this may not lead to more successful reforms, it may nevertheless provide a more comprehensive interpretive framework.

Riddell classifies the various issues that have been prominent on the agenda of reform in terms of the specific focus of each of these disciplines (1999 pp. 209–16). For an educational planner, these include access to education; the quality of learning; equity in participation across income, social groups, and gender; and issues relating to school effectiveness and improvement. The key concerns of economists have been efficiency, resource use, whether or not the system meets its own goals (for example, in terms of every child completing primary school), and the interface of the school with the labour market in terms of the skills needed and the wages earned. Notice that issues of quality and the teacher-learner interface do not appear on the agenda of most economists, although they are addressed by educationists. That said there is considerable overlap between what educational planners and economists take into consideration. For example, the issue of school effectiveness emphasised by planners is similar to the efficiency analyses of economists, as both talk about an efficient combination and use of inputs. Moreover, both of these perspectives assist educational managers.

Analysis emanating from the World Bank used the “economic lens” and understandably so given the Bank’s approach to financing projects that have a clear economic benefit. But this analytical perspective had special significance because the institution also shaped reform policies on a large scale.¹² In the first overall review of education conducted in 1995, “prudent use of economic analysis focussed on labour market outcomes” in order to set priorities for education sector reforms was emphasised (World Bank 1995 p. 9). Further, it was stated that: “while governments determine priorities for many reasons, economic analysis of education—in particular, the rate of return analysis—is a diagnostic tool with which to start the process of setting priorities and considering alternative ways of achieving objectives within a sectoral approach” (World Bank 1995 p. 94). However, recently there has been a broadening of this narrow analytical focus to include aspects of governance—especially issues of providing the right incentives and accountability mechanisms to improve the service delivery of education (World Bank 2003a, 2008).

Riddell (1999) highlights the distinct focus of the “political lens” as being different from the other two—especially with regard to agenda setting and implementation processes by which reforms are brought about. This view of the political lens as being mainly concerned with implementation is also shared by Grindle (2004 pp.1–2) in her analysis of the politics of educational reform in 12 Latin American countries during the 1990s. She notes that “most analysis of education policy seeks to assess efforts to improve conditions in the sector which include increasing the efficiency with which services are delivered, reducing illiteracy and repetition rates, boosting student learning through new curricula and pedagogy, measuring the impact of standard based testing, [and] evaluating the results of school autonomy”, among others. While these measures are important for improving the quality and functioning of the education sector and for analysing which of the alternate policies are more efficient, they take the process of reform for granted. She further notes that in order to understand the specifically political dynamic, it is important to see “...how improved education becomes part of a political agenda, how reform initiatives are developed, what interactions and negotiations shape or alter their contents, how

¹² Even though education lending was a large part of the World Bank’s portfolio, it began to play an important role in setting out policy directions for the sector only after the Jomtien Conference on *Education For All* in 1990.

important actors and interests respond to change proposals, how initiatives are implemented and sustained once they are introduced...” For her, reforms signal “deliberate efforts to make changes in policies about education”. And comprehending the politics of this process includes understanding how reformers find room for manoeuvre, and deal with sources of resistance. Further, reforms are deliberate efforts on the part of a government’s attempt to “redress perceived errors in prior and existing arrangements in policies and institutions” (Grindle and Thomas 1991 p. 4). I adapt this definition to understand the deliberate efforts of the government to redress policies and institutions involved in the provision of school education.

Starting from a narrow definition of educational reform driven by the structural adjustment agenda, many developing countries have embarked on much wider changes encompassing the entire educational system, or one or more of its sub-systems. Consistent with the broad consensus of past research, I use the following criteria for what constitutes educational reform: a critique and modification of existing policy and institutional arrangements that induces major shifts in resource priorities, institutional arrangements, and even the culture of work. As the scope of “educational reform” has widened, so the narrow economic lens has also proved to be an inadequate one for both designing and understanding the reform process.

1.4 Studying the Research Questions in the Context of India

I study the specific research questions raised above within the empirical settings of change in two similar political systems with comparable opportunities for improving their public primary education systems. The settings are the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Bihar. In the 1990s, these two states were among the most educationally backward in the country. Moreover, inequality in school participation based on caste and gender was deep-seated in both. Although there was little hard evidence, the quality of schools in both AP and Bihar was widely seen as poor. In order to improve their school systems, both states were provided with similar opportunities in terms of external aid routed through the Centre in Delhi. However, after more than a decade of reform interventions, the states experienced

divergent trajectories of educational development.¹³ This thesis explores the role of politics in accounting for the different achievements in these states, and it tests the two hypotheses discussed earlier in order to help understand why they diverged so much in terms of their educational outcomes (seen primarily in terms of rates of primary school participation).

I consider the implementation of educational reform policies in the two states between 1994–2011. Within this period, I particularly focus on the period which stretches from the early 1990s (when reforms were introduced) until 2005–06, as this happens to be a period when there was relative continuity in political leadership in both the states. Following the National Policy of Education (NPE) of 1986, and the Programme of Action (PoA) of 1992 (that was meant to operationalise the NPE) educational reforms were introduced gradually in the early 1990s. They were intended to improve school participation rates and the quality of institutions. Further, reforms were first introduced at the primary level (that is, grades I–V), followed by reforms targeted at the entire elementary cycle (that is, grades I–VIII).

A comparative analysis of this kind in the two states faces several challenges. The first of these derives from the division of powers in the Indian political system. Following an amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1976, primary education became a joint responsibility of both the Centre and the states. Hence, the changes following the NPE in 1986 were initiated by federal policies (that is, those of the Centre in Delhi) but they subsequently required state level implementation. Hence, actors, interests, and institutions at both levels of government need to be considered.

Second, due to differences in the timing of elections between the central and the state governments, and also in elections for different state governments, the specific political leaders in office changed with time, particularly at the federal level. Furthermore, the tenure of different state governments also differed. Overall, however, there was considerable continuity in political leadership in the two states for most of the period under consideration here. Thus in AP, Chandra Babu Naidu of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) governed between 1995 and 2004. Relatedly, the Chief Minister of Bihar during 1990–97 was Lalu Prasad Yadav of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). After 1997 he retained political

¹³ This divergence is evident in the trends in educational participation for primary school grades reported from the household surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). For more on this see Chapter 4.

power indirectly when his wife became the Chief Minister (1997–2004).¹⁴ I also incorporate policy and political changes after 2005–06, and until 2011—but mainly to confirm or modify the findings about the political dynamics of the policy reform process observed between 1994 and 2005–06.

Finally, the “educational reform” considered here comprise a large variety of federal interventions in primary school education following the NPE 1986. The first set of federal programmes for primary education was introduced with domestic resources alone. This was followed by small state projects with external funding. But the large inflow of external resources for primary education came mainly with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) launched in 1993, and subsequently the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) which extended the programme to upper primary school grades (elementary education) in 2000.¹⁵ Further, states joined these federal reform programmes at different times, adding to the complexity of the analysis.¹⁶ A detailed overview of the various federal interventions in school education is provided in Chapter 3.

For this research I maintain that the changes and initiatives introduced under the externally funded DPEP (and following it under the SSA), in the two states deserve to be considered as “educational reform”. This is because, unlike other federal government primary education programmes launched after the NPE 1986, the DPEP signalled deliberate change in existing policy and institutional arrangements, including at the state level. Moreover, it was aimed at a broad reorganisation of the sector that was continued under SSA. I focus specifically on two key aspects of the DPEP programme—both of which had significant possibilities for modification and implementation at the state level. They are: (i) decentralisation with community participation, and (ii) teacher management policies. These constitute two important arenas where the reforms were contested and reshaped by the interaction of different political interests and institutions. I then analyse

¹⁴ Lalu Prasad Yadav had to step down as Chief Minister in 1997 following corruption charges and a term in jail.

¹⁵ The most notable of the school reform programmes started in the early 1990s was the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). Planning for the DPEP started in 1992 and it was formally launched in 1993. Policy reforms under the DPEP are the starting point for the period under consideration here. The DPEP also marked the first ever World Bank funding for primary education in India.

¹⁶ Different states entered the programme at different times. For example, in the selected states, the DPEP started in AP in 1996–97 with support from the UK government (that is, DFID); extra districts were added in 1999 with World Bank support. In Bihar, the DPEP was launched in October 1997 and ended in March 2006.

the process and outcome of the implementation of various reforms and initiatives at the school level. My purpose in doing this is to understand reform results from the ground level, including the contexts and factors that operate at the school level. In this analysis at the school level I also consider several other federal government programmes besides the DPEP. The most significant of these are Operation Blackboard (OB) and the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) programme, both of which were domestically funded.¹⁷ Although these programmes were very different from the DPEP in that they allowed little room for manoeuvre for state governments to either influence their design or adapt them to local conditions, nevertheless they potentially provided substantial federal resources to states, and their implementation was definitely influenced by state governments. Moreover, at the school level, the beneficiaries experienced the sum total of various government initiatives. They did not see themselves or the schools as recipients of benefits deriving from several different schemes (such as the DPEP or OB).

1.5 Chapter Plan

Based on a review of the literature, Chapter 2 analyses the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the principal theoretical frameworks within which the politics of educational reform has been investigated. The findings suggest that there exist two distinct sets of approaches inspired respectively by economic theory and sociological theory. In the analysis inspired by economic theory, reform is seen as a technical plan whose outcomes are beholden to societal interest groups. In contrast, the historical and institutional contexts, the evolution of the policy process, and the conflicts involved in policy implementation are all more central to deliberations inspired by the sociological theory. My particular approach draws on the scholarship inspired by sociological theory, although with the modifications suggested by Grindle (2004 p.15) in order to focus on the dynamic processes of change as they unfold through time. Ideas regarding change are important. And so too are policy actions and political leaders—especially their ability to use the opportunities provided by the reform process to negotiate strategically with opponents.

¹⁷ Both the DPEP and domestically funded schemes like the Operation Blackboard became a part of an expanded and integrated agenda for school reforms under the SSA launched in 2000.

Because I am concerned with the political process of policy implementation, especially the contrasting policies of managing teacher interests, enhancing community control, and bringing about decentralisation, I examine the available scholarship in these particular areas with reference to India. The review underscores that very little analysis exists on the politics of educational reform in the country. In recent years the formal economy framework has been frequently used; and in this literature, teachers have usually been viewed as “vested interests” who are opposed to reforms. Since there is little analysis of successful cases, it is unclear whether teachers actually oppose reform as much as theory would have us expect. Also, there is a sense of optimism regarding the contribution of community participation and decentralisation, once again, not supported by the empirical literature. The gaps in previous and current scholarship reflect its implicit preoccupation with the political economy theory regarding societal interests, its lack of study of successful cases of reform, on the process of change, and on the actions of reform leaders.

At the end of Chapter 2, I outline the methodology adopted for this research. This includes providing a description of the sources of data, the tools used for its collection, and the procedure for the selection of field sites from where primary information was gathered. This forms the basis for understanding how reforms work at the local level in the two states selected for the research.

Chapters 3 and 4 scrutinise the policy framework and empirical context within which the comparative study of educational reform implementation is located. Chapter 3 assesses the context of the federal policy within which reform initiatives were undertaken in the states. Based on a review of national policy documents and federal finances for education, I argue that by the 1990s there was a thorough critique of the earlier preoccupation with expansion-oriented policies in educational development, and that the state governments were unable to take the lead in initiating change because they were experiencing severe financial constraints. It is in this context that the Centre in Delhi took the lead in setting out new policy directions and mobilising additional resources for primary education (including getting access to external aid). Based on a review of trends in state education finances between 1990–91 and 2007–08, I then compare aspects of the variation in the performance of 15 states, with special attention to those categorised as

educationally backward.¹⁸ It is to answer the key question raised by this analysis—namely why educationally backward states differed so much in making use of the opportunities provided by federal policy and resources—that I compare the two states under study.

Chapter 4 looks more directly at the units of the study, that is, AP and Bihar. On the basis of research and policy literature, the chapter compares the context and institutional arrangements through which educational reforms were implemented; and it then examines outcome indicators such as school participation rates, using data from the National Sample Survey (NSS) for 1993–94 and 2007–08. Two key similarities of context were the fact that both the states were educationally backward, and that political power in was in the hands of a new political leadership. These led to expectations of similar outcomes of reforms and of the role that political leaders would play in the process. Given this, the variation in school participation rates in the two states, after a considerable period of reform implementation, appears to be a “puzzle”. Further exploration of the implementation process is considered necessary to explain this.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 investigate why reform outcomes were so much better in AP as compared to Bihar. The expectations generated using the formal political economy theory suggest that the explanation might lie in a weaker influence of teacher unions on state policies in AP, and that it might also reflect a stronger working of demand side pressures generated by community participation and decentralisation in this state. Each of these chapters explores the empirical evidence on different aspects of reform goal expectations and implementation, based on a review of policy documents, interviews with key actors, and surveys and focus group discussions conducted in sample districts, blocks, and schools.

In Chapter 5, reform interventions with respect to teacher policies and the attitude of teacher unions to reform are evaluated. At the stage of agenda setting, perhaps anticipating resistance, the federal guidelines were silent on the subject of teachers, and they did not recommend any “hard” measures. However, the state governments implementing the reforms had to respond immediately with explicit measures—faced as they were with some difficult choices. On the one hand, high expenditure on teacher

¹⁸ The most recent data on educational finances of the Centre and the states in India is for 2007–08 and this is what I have included in my analysis. There is a considerable delay in reporting of actual expenditure.

salaries was a key constraint in policy innovation and teacher unions were seen as being opponents of reform. On the other hand, there was a need for cooperation from the teachers in order to implement the new measures. I find that AP and Bihar adopted contrasting policies with respect to teachers, and that this had different implications for the reform process. In addition, teacher unions in the two states varied in terms of their strength, partisan affiliation, and their relationship with their respective state governments. However, in neither state was the collective action of the unions the main impediment to change and reform leaders found the opportunity to manoeuvre teacher interests towards the goals of new policy.

In Chapter 6, I examine how far the variation in the performance of the two states was due to differences in the design and working of decentralisation and variations in the participation of potential beneficiaries. I find that policy and political actors in both the states innovated as regards the design of decentralisation, and that they set up school committees with statutory authorisation. In AP, these committees worked under a centralised model of control by the top political leadership, whereas in Bihar there was local “elite capture” of these bodies. In neither state did decentralisation and community participation have the beneficial “demand side” outcomes that might have been expected on the basis of theory.

Chapter 7 provides an account of how macro-level reforms have been implemented at the local level. This is based on quantitative data from school and household surveys, and qualitative data from interviews, focus group discussions, and school observations—all qualitative data were collected by me and a research team provided support in collecting data for the school and household surveys.¹⁹ I review the results of policy reform at the grassroots level in terms of school participation and attendance, and the quality and adequacy of inputs—for example, physical infrastructure, teachers, and the working of incentive schemes (especially the MDM programme). This local grassroots view of how schools work provides a moderated view of some of the claims of “success” in AP. Indeed, I found that there was scope for significant improvement in teachers’ attitudes and the physical infrastructure of schools in this state. However, the reform process did work better

¹⁹ In conducting the school and household survey, I had the support of a research team. I was one of the surveyors and travelled along with the team.

in AP than in Bihar. This was on account of policy innovation and entrepreneurship shown by policymakers and support from political leaders. These were evinced in the nature of various initiatives coming from “above”, in the centralised interventions in teacher management policies, curbing vested interests around schools, and effective reach of school-based incentive schemes in AP. Reliance on decentralisation in the absence of institutional and political support from above led to a situation of “abandoned” schools in Bihar, confirming the observations of Corbridge et al. (2005) about there being a scarce presence of the state at the local level. What was needed, therefore, was not “less of the state”, but greater state action in public interest for educational reform to succeed.

Finally, Chapter 8 pulls together the main findings of this research and its relevance for the design and implementation of educational reform in the future. The conclusion I draw is that whereas successful reform adoption has been the result of states finding an alignment between their own interests and the federal opportunity for reforms, successful implementation has been the result as much of policy adaptation, manoeuvring and political skills, used to mobilise and align teacher interests towards achieving the goals of new policy. There is little evidence of decentralisation and community participation contributing to greater local control over schools, or improvement of schools more generally. However, they remain goals to be pursued in a normative sense.

1.6 Significance of this Research

This research adds to the literature on educational reform in several ways. It explicitly focuses on the politics of educational reform in India—a subject that has been almost entirely neglected in previous academic literature. It also makes use of differences between the execution of reforms in two distinct entities operating in similar policy and political contexts of the federal government, and highlights the critical role of political factors, ideas, interests, and institutions in shaping the path of overall reform implementation. Finally, the work contributes to a broadening of the theoretical framework within which the implementation of educational reform should be understood. Viewing policy consequences from the ground is innovative as it includes the perspective of those for whom change is intended. Therefore, it expands the horizon within which to understand the outcomes of change.

Chapter 2

Theory and Practice of Educational Reform in India: A Review of Literature

The policy changes that initiated economic reforms in India since the 1990s, and the politics associated with this process, have been widely debated in the global arena. However, the politics of educational reform has not received comparable attention. This is similar to what Kaufman and Nelson (2004) observed for Latin American countries in their analysis of the political factors that influenced the shaping of the education and health reforms there during the late 1980s and 1990s. They noted that while “the politics of reform has been examined extensively in the case of ‘first-phase’ macro-economic reforms ... it has only very recently begun to receive attention in the case of ‘second-phase’ social-sector policies...” (Kaufman and Nelson 2004 p. 3). Undoubtedly, the main reason for this was the greater significance of economic policies, and their capacity to affect incomes, employment, and savings of people, thereby generating immediate and widespread reaction. In contrast, reform of education was less “dramatic”, and it consisted of slow changes in complex administrative systems.²⁰ Nevertheless, the changes themselves have been considered as politically contentious and they require different lenses in order to yield a nuanced analysis of a complex process.

In India, nearly two decades since school educational reform was initiated through slow changes in the federal policy framework, the political dynamics of this process is receiving greater attention in research literature. A general explanation of the role of political factors, or of differences between various Indian states in implementing and

²⁰ For most scholars writing about the politics of educational reform like Grindle (2004), Nelson (2007), and Kaufman and Nelson (2004), differences in the nature of economic and educational policy reforms are the starting point for explaining the “distinct” nature of politics in the process of educational reform. Some of these differences have to do with the fact that economic policy reforms were seen as responding to a sense of urgency, and the new policies were based on clear “templates” of policy change—as exemplified in the Washington Consensus; they could even be stroke-of-a-pen policy changes. In education, however, there was never a sense of crisis as things deteriorated over a long period of time and the impact was harder to perceive for those who were affected.

sustaining educational reform, is yet to emerge.²¹ However, the political dynamics around specific reform interventions such as decentralisation, teacher management policies, and the role of powerful teacher unions in resisting change are being widely debated.

This chapter has two objectives. The first is to examine the principal theoretical frameworks within which the reform-politics relationship has so far been analysed in the literature. Economics and sociological theory provide two distinct sources of inspiration for most of the approaches. I argue that the analysis inspired by economic theory underpins much of the policy that is designed for educational reform, as well as the emerging body of research into the political factors that affect such reform. However, I maintain that this is flawed in that it over-estimates both the constraining role of special interests on policy change, and the reform-promoting role of decentralisation and community participation. Also, while each framework has some strength in terms of how it describes reality or the explanations that it posits, independently neither of the two is able to account for cases of successful reform outcomes.

The second objective of this chapter is to explain the methodology for examining the research questions of this thesis—specifically the political factors associated with the implementation of educational reform in Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Bihar. The analysis of the approach taken by these two states, including the differences in the idea for reforms and the actions of political leaders, forms the basis for evolving a richer and more complex understanding of the part that is played by politics in promoting or constraining changes in school education.

The chapter has five main sections. The first examines the main theoretical frameworks and their relevance and adequacy for analysing the relationship between politics and educational reform in the Indian context. The next two sections move to the implementation of this reform, and present findings of research on specific reform

²¹ Much of the early literature on educational reform in India is in the form of programme evaluations or reports commissioned by the federal government and donor agencies, mainly the World Bank and the European Commission. These include, for example, the World Bank (1997, 2003b); Hirshberg (2002); Glinskaya and Jalan (2003); EC commissioned Bashir (2000) and Jha, Saxena, Baxi (2001); and programme monitoring and evaluation reports of the Bihar Education Project, the *Lok Jumbish* Project, and the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). These provide a wealth of information on policy and institutional constraints around the implementation of educational reforms in the states. But they do not make any explicit references to politics, and reforms are understood only as a matter of technical design.

interventions from experience related to India. Accordingly, the role of politics in implementing teacher management policies, politics of teacher unions, and scholarship on decentralisation and community participation are examined in these two sections.²² The next section discusses the methodological contributions of this literature, especially the growing significance of analysing the local consequences of policy interventions. The final section presents the methodology used for this research.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives

In the relevant literature, interactions between policy and politics in educational reform have been examined within theoretical perspectives developed to analyse state policy reforms in general. Grindle (2001) and Kaufman (1999) note that two distinct traditions, inspired by economics and sociological theory respectively, lie at the source of these different approaches. The new or formal political economy approach and rational choice institutionalism were inspired by economics, while comparative-historical institutionalism was inspired primarily by sociological theory.²³ Approaches stimulated by the two disciplines model reality in different ways and offer strikingly different explanations for policy choice and change. While “parsimony and elegance” are the characteristics of the explanations inspired by economics, “insight into conflict and process” are characteristics of the explanations coming from sociology (Grindle 2001 p. 346).²⁴

In the approaches inspired by economic theory, pursuing and protecting self-interest is seen as the core motivation for politics. Political activity is characterised by competition among groups to achieve this end. The image of politics, as it appears from the formal political economy explanation, is that of “capture” of the state by special interests. In this scenario, reforming state policies is difficult as it is likely to aggravate societal

²² Given that this research examines school reform policies initiated in the 1990s the literature review is largely restricted to research and publications undertaken between 1990 and the present time.

²³ Grindle (2001 pp. 350–53) refers to it as “comparative institutionalism” following the 1995 *World Politics* symposium on understanding “The role of theory in comparative politics”. Hall and Taylor (1996), Ikenberry (1994), and Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstrech (1992) refer to it as “historical institutionalism”. The latter term has been more widely used in the literature. The assumptions and arguments about the political process remain the same in both cases. I prefer Grindle’s usage of the term for its special relevance for a comparative analysis of variations in policy processes and for the variety of methods adopted by comparative institutionalists.

²⁴ She suggests that choice between the two was indeed a “stark trade-off” (Grindle 2001 p. 346).

interests. Rational choice theorists accept and develop this explanation of the political arena being dominated by special interests still further. They focus more directly on political actors and institutions. According to this theory, politicians face a series of collective action dilemmas while deliberating about policy change. At the root of these dilemmas is the conflict between the actions that a politician is likely to pursue for achieving her/his self-interest—the goals of achieving or retaining political power—and the outcomes that would be less than desirable for society as a whole. Even with these results, a politician would be constrained against abandoning her course of action because this would likely give an advantage to her political competitors. The strong points in favour of this theory are the use of deductive methods to arrive at conclusions, and the possibility of generalising these conclusions across contexts. However, the key limitation of this approach is its inability to explain why policy change happens, as the main emphasis is on explaining why politicians will not prefer change. This inability to explain change is a direct consequence of the underlying assumption that a political actor's rationality is equivalent to pursuing her self-interest. That a political actor or the government could possibly act with a view to promoting public interest or keeping certain larger purposes in mind is difficult to conceive under the tenets of this theory (Grindle 2001).

The approach of comparative institutionalists stands in contrast to the above. Politics is viewed as a struggle, or a contested process, where the context and institutions are very important. Therefore, the politics of reform will be characterised less by calculations of income or power, and more by the existing matrix of institutions. In place of the “thin” theory of rationality used in formal models of political economy, this approach argues that the context shapes the behaviour of political actors in profound ways. The resultant theory is rich in depth and complexity, and is historically grounded. Further, the explanations are developed inductively; they are not strictly generalisable but are more in the nature of “middle-range” theories that can highlight the political conditions under which change takes place.

Formal political economy and rational choice arguments are prominent in much of the recent scholarship on the politics of educational reform in India. In this literature,

politics is viewed in terms of opportunities for patronage, control by special interest groups, and poor service delivery due to persisting principal-agent dilemmas (Béteille 2009; Devarajan and Shah 2004; Keefer and Khemani 2004; Kremer, Chaudhury, Rogers, Muralidharan, and Hammers 2005). Keefer and Khemani (2004) note that in the Indian electoral context, there is a lack of credibility of political promises to provide public goods such as education which benefit large numbers, as opposed to private transfers and subsidies being given to a narrow section. “(P)olitical patrons provide private goods to their clients”, and further “...the greater the focus of government spending on items targeted for specific individuals (clients),...the less spent on public goods” (Keefer and Khemani 2004 p. 937). These observations follow from those of Olson (1965) about the difficulties of sustaining collective action in large groups, in contrast to targeted action in small groups yielding direct benefits in the form of electoral outcomes for a politician.

Béteille (2009) applies the rational choice method to explore the micro-foundations of accountability problems among teachers in the three states of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh (MP), and Rajasthan. She sees the relationship between politicians and teachers as one of political exchange. Politicians used discretionary powers given in transfer rules for teachers as a patronage opportunity for granting the latter their desired postings; in return teachers provided politicians with electoral support.

Béteille’s analysis displays a richness and complexity, especially her understanding of strategic linkages between teachers and politicians, mediated through informal institutions of the middleman (known as a *dalal*), and power hierarchies, and is based on qualitative sources of information that include interviews and newspaper reports (Béteille 2009 pp.83–5, 136–40). She sees these links between teachers and politicians as a “deeply embedded structural problem of India’s democracy” (p.9), wherein the compulsion of winning elections leads politicians to rely on teachers, and teachers in turn to extract good postings from the former, in the process manipulating formal rules and creating accountability problems. But she views the role of these political links primarily as a constraint that comes in the way of fair implementation of policies relating to teacher accountability. She is unable to account for the comparative variations that may have existed in the nature of these relationships across the three states she studies, and the

impression conveyed is that compulsions of democratic politics will make it difficult to implement formal rules, irrespective of differences in the historical or policy context. Béteille is also unable to distinguish between the differences in the roles of politicians and government officers, whereas, I find the two playing specific and somewhat different roles in the course of implementation of reforms, and their actions vary in terms of the impact on outcomes.

Although until recently the scholarship on educational reform in India made no explicit use of approaches inspired by sociological theory, historical path-dependence was an implicit argument in some of the early literature explaining variations in the performance of different states. Specifically, Kerala's exemplary performance among all the Indian states was explained on the basis of the policies of the princely state of Travancore, which was not formally a part of "British India", and where the native government proclaimed its responsibility to provide for school education. Through an edict in 1817, it decided to defray the entire expenses for education, started government schools in many areas, and provided "grants-in-aid" to private schools (Thomas 2001 p. 168). It is interesting to note that Keefer and Khemani (2004) adopt a formal political economy approach yet make some use of history in explaining the differing performance of Indian states. The authors argue that electoral competition in India encourages private transfers to a few citizens, rather than broad-based access to public services that would benefit many people. They also notice variations in performance among Indian states and see the striking contrast in human development outcomes between Kerala and Uttar Pradesh to be a result of "path-dependence" on account of historical differences in institutions and patterns of mobilisation. Particularly, the states ruled by British colonial rulers through landlords were worse-off in comparison to those ruled by native rulers—known as "princely states" (Keefer and Khemani 2004 pp. 938–9).

Sharma (2000) sees the current constraints in school education as a result of an inadequate and weak presence of institutions that could “professionalize” school education and teaching. In an explicitly historical-institutional analysis, she concludes that teacher training and block level oversight of schools through the office of the Block Education Officer (BEO) are the weakest institutions. This inadequacy is the result of a certain “path-dependence” inherited from colonial times and also due to the sequence in which policies emerged in independent India. After independence, the agenda of agricultural modernisation took precedence in ideas on community development. As a result, little attention was paid to evolving school-oriented institutions at the district and sub-district levels. The BEO continued to work in the colonial mould as an inspector, unsuitable for the needs of educational development. Due to the weakness of institutions, *Panchayati Raj* (political decentralisation) was unlikely to make much headway in improving school quality. In Sharma’s analysis, the manner in which institutions have evolved over time acts as a constraint to change.

Sharma and Ramachandran (2009) adopt an explicit institutional focus in their comparison of education systems in AP and Rajasthan and use insights from the works of Migdal (1994) and Evans (1995) for their research. The authors note the importance of a state’s structure, and consider variations in the internal structure of a state, the relationship of the state to society, and differences in the implementation process as the basis for comparing the dynamic nature of working of schools in these two states. They conclude that the working of a large informal system around the formal structure contributes to opportunities for patronage and networking; and that reforms must protect “the public sphere from individual greed” (Sharma and Ramachandran 2009 p. 321).

A different and more sociologically inspired institutionalism is evident in Corbridge, Williams, Srivastav, and Veron (2005). The authors follow Migdal’s approach (1994) and develop an inductive micro-theory inspired by local political studies.²⁵ They analyse some of the ways in which the state deals with the poor, and how the poor in turn see the state in rural areas of eastern India (including in Bihar, Jharkhand, and West

²⁵Atul Kohli notes this to be one of the methods adopted by those who adopt the “eclectic middle ground” in terms of methods—with rational choice representing one end of the spectrum and post-modern cultural deconstruction the other end (World Politics 1995 p. 48).

Bengal). They examine state-poor relations in the context of implementation of two programmes meant for the poor—the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and the Employment Assurance Programme. The authors provide an account of the local state through its daily practices and assess some of the claims made by policy in the background of what obtains in daily practice. They find that official claims of participatory development made by the state in India as also by development agencies, had a far greater sense of optimism, which was in contrast to what obtained on the ground—there was very little of the state to be seen at this level. This means that the claims about greater participation of beneficiaries were not resulting in greater state involvement to resolve the problems of the poor.

2.2 Specific Reform Interventions: Teacher Policies and the Politics of Unions

Teacher Issues in Official Policy and Research Literature

This section assesses the arguments on the basis of which teachers and their collective action were thought of as opponents to the change process, and the extent to which they actually blocked the implementation process. In official documents, teachers seemed to be one of the key problems in schooling in India in the early 1990s.²⁶ School education was a labour intensive sector employing nearly 2.8 million teachers in primary and upper primary schools in 1993 (World Bank 1997 p.143). State government budgets were spent almost entirely on paying teacher salaries, leaving little room for spending on initiatives for improving quality.²⁷ Poor motivation of teachers and poor quality of teaching were seen as the root cause of poor learning outcomes. Field surveys found that teachers were not good at the subjects they taught or in the instructional material they used, leading to poor

²⁶ “Official documents” include some of the literature published by donor agencies involved in the design and funding of the programme, especially the World Bank’s *Primary Education in India* (1997). This document arose from extensive discussions with the Department of Education (DoE) of the Government of India (GoI) and research studies carried out in relation to the DPEP.

²⁷ According to the World Bank (1997 pp. 1–2), teacher salaries consumed 97 per cent of the primary education budget, leaving very little scope for any new expenditure, including instructional materials and teacher in-service training.

learning outcomes (World Bank 1997).²⁸ Efforts to improve this situation needed resources and a possible reduction in the expenditure on teachers, a move that was likely to face resistance from teacher unions.

In national policy documents that set the agenda for reform, two things were evident. First, the policy documents anticipated likely opposition from teachers and did not recommend any harsh steps, and second, they even tried to win over the support of the teachers through small measures. For example, they did not recommend any reduction in teacher salaries or changing their security of tenure (Government of India 1995; Pandey 2000). At the same time, teachers had reasons to fear increased workloads, greater local supervision, and introduction of new accountability measures, especially through village level committees that were likely to be vehicles of both decentralisation and teacher accountability. The federal guidelines made no explicit recommendations to increase community control over teachers in the nationally formulated technical design. Instead, through small measures such as teacher grants, they generated enormous goodwill and a sense of participation of teachers in the reform process (Pandey 2000 p. 22).

Teacher accountability issues gained increasing significance in the research literature, especially as reforms moved to the implementation stage in the states. Nearly a decade after school reform policies had been launched, issues of teachers being absent from their jobs or their poor performance were appropriately highlighted in the literature. References were increasingly made to the political power of teachers organised as a special interest group and wielding control over democratic politics in the states.

Research literature on various aspects of school reforms became available only around the end of the 1990s. The Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) (1999) was the first of its kind—a research report that brought together the perspectives of researchers, activists, and officers concerned with primary education. Based on a field survey in the educationally backwards states of Bihar, MP, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh,²⁹ the report highlights the dismal status of primary schools in these states. The report combines the

²⁸ World Bank (1997) cites a study by Bashir (1994) according to which only half of grade IV teachers in Tamil Nadu could answer correctly a test meant for grade IV students in Mathematics.

²⁹ These states were and are popularly referred to by the acronym BIMARU, meaning sick or unwell in Hindi.

voices of stakeholders—teachers, parents, and children—whose “voices (*it*) broadcast without distortion or static” (PROBE 1999 Foreword, emphasis added). It devotes a full chapter to the issue of teachers (Chapter 5 pp. 53–68). Here it makes a reference to two important issues that inspired a lot of the subsequent research on the political role of teachers in constraining reforms—the issue of their weak accountability and the political role of unions.

The PROBE report notes that teachers are the key actors of the system. Yet there is widespread inertia in their performance due to the demotivating environment in which they work and lack of accountability in their performance. The demotivating environment is largely due to the lack of effective training and also due to a lack of commitment to teaching; teachers see teaching only as a high paying job. The report adopts a holistic approach in that it does not blame the teachers alone for this situation. It also notes teachers’ concerns about the poor infrastructure with which they have to teach and parental apathy towards schooling as contributing to this demotivating environment.

According to the PROBE report, the bigger problem is that of accountability, in describing which it makes implicit use of the arguments of formal political economy. Teachers in government schools were secure in their jobs because no penal action was imposed on them for poor performance or lack of accountability; this was in contrast to the situation in private schools. Introducing accountability was difficult because of problems in observing a teacher’s work in school. An important way out of the situation, suggested by the report, was greater cooperation between a teacher and the community. While a part of the explanation for poor teacher performance was the degrading work environment where teachers were “trapped in a ramshackle village school, surrounded by disgruntled parents, irregular pupils, and overbearing inspectors”, the deterioration in teaching standards could not be fully accounted for by these factors alone (PROBE report 1999 p. 63).

The issue of weak teacher accountability has been frequently taken up in subsequent research, especially after the publication of the World Development Report (2004). Kremer et al. (2005) point out that there is a lot of wastage of public spending on education in India because of teacher absenteeism. In what is a nationally representative

survey, teacher absenteeism rates were reportedly as high as 24–25 per cent.³⁰ Almost a quarter of the teachers surveyed, and almost half of those present in schools, were found to be not teaching. Since teachers enjoyed the status of civil servants and they were almost never fired from their jobs for wrongdoing, they were impervious to sanctions. Earlier Sipahimalani-Rao's (2004) study on teacher management issues had also addressed a concern similar to that of Kremer et al. (2005)—that poor management of teachers was an impediment to service delivery.³¹ In what remains till date as one of the few comparative analyses on teacher policies in the two Indian states of Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh, Sipahimalani-Rao examines the full range of issues with respect to policies of teacher management and finds that the key differences are that Karnataka did not hire para-teachers, conducted centralised tests for teacher recruitment, and developed a transparent policy for teacher postings.³² All of these were missing in the case of Uttar Pradesh, leaving scope for political discretion. On the issue of teacher absenteeism, this study qualifies the claim of Kremer et al. (2005) by disaggregating leave as authorised or unauthorised, and points out that unauthorised leave accounts for only about 3–4 per cent of total teacher absenteeism. Hence, the policy needs to address specifically why teachers have to be outside schools during working hours on authorised official chores.

Béteille (2009) views politics as the key impediment which obstructs formal policies for teacher accountability from working effectively. Her arguments about the use of political discretion in bending rules and cultivating patronage relationships in teacher transfers have been discussed earlier in this chapter, and they are illustrative of the main tenets of the political economy formulations about the powerful role played by special interest groups in controlling the outcomes of democratic politics, that is, winning elections. Béteille sees teacher absenteeism as a problem where politically powerful teachers are able to bend formal rules and save themselves from punishment. In her thesis,

³⁰ The survey for Kremer et al.'s research (2005) was done as a part of background work for the 2004 *World Development Report*.

³¹ The findings of the survey research for Kremer et al. (2005) were available prior to Sipahimalani-Rao's work in 2004. Sipahimalani-Rao's research (2004) was also funded by the World Bank.

³² The term "para-teacher" refers to teachers hired on short-term contract. It became a practice in many Indian states, most notable among them being Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, to hire such teachers as a part of the policy innovations that they adopted in implementing the DPEP, or *Lok Jumbish* in the case of Rajasthan. See NCAER (2008) for details of the variety in policy and practice with respect to para-teachers in Indian states.

the political power of teachers is said to originate from their role as opinion makers—for example, acting as polling agents on election days, and even influencing the outcome of elections through manipulation. However, the evidence for this view comes mainly from qualitative interviews and newspaper reports analysed by Béteille. They are not robust, generalisable observations based on the survey that she undertook for this research. She also examines whether teacher absenteeism is higher in the case of teachers with political connections and those who are members of unions. For this, she uses the nationally representative dataset used by Kremer et al. (2005). The results are revealing in that she finds that a major part of teacher absenteeism was due to authorised leave and official duties. This conclusion echoes that of Sipahimalani-Rao (2004). For the small proportion of unauthorised leave taken by teachers—that is, real absenteeism—political considerations seem to have played only a small role.³³ A teacher’s membership of a political party appears to have some impact, while Béteille finds limited evidence for the influence of union membership. She concludes that “the exact relationship between union membership, power and absences needs to be better understood” (Béteille 2009 p. 111). She also points out that gathering hard evidence on this issue is difficult.

My criticism of Béteille’s approach and conclusions pertains to the fact that her sole focus is on understanding why things do not function properly. Consequently, her approach is restricted to the negative role played by politics. When talking of the nexus of relationships between politicians, officials, and teachers she remarks tellingly that while there are politicians and government officials who are incorruptible, to find out “why things do not work satisfactorily, it is important to focus on the corruptible ones” (Béteille 2009 p. 43).

Collective Action by Teacher Unions as an Impediment to Reform

The “explicit” relationship between politics and educational reform has been clearly perceived and extensively examined in the literature dealing with the role of teacher

³³ Unauthorised leave was estimated by Béteille at just 2.76 per cent. Authorised leave was the most significant reason why teachers were absent—37.69 per cent. Nearly 28 per cent of teacher absence was explained by the performance of official duties outside of school such as election related work and attending government meetings on health and other issues (Béteille 2009 p. 98).

unions. Research based on Olson's (1965) "logic of collective action" begins from the expectation that unions are potentially the foremost opponents of change. Thus, pursuing this logic Corrales (1999) notes that their high level of organisation, their use of the discriminatory "strike" weapon to challenge the government, and their lack of aversion to enter into conflict with the state (due to the left-leaning ideology of their leaders) are all factors that contribute to their political power. Also, in many cases union leaders have longer tenure than politicians. This makes them powerful and means that they are in a strong position to influence politicians.³⁴ Corrales differentiates between types of reform policies, and notes that an earlier set of policy changes adopted by many developing countries during the initial stages of their nation-building process emphasised the expansion of access to schooling. Moreover, expanding access generally found favour both with teacher unions and politicians. The unions, however, opposed new reforms aimed at increasing the efficiency of schools.³⁵

Along lines similar to these arguments, teacher unions in many Indian states were indeed at the forefront of demands for the "nationalisation" of the school sector, that is, arguing for the state takeover of the management and teacher services operating under the aegis of both the local government and privately managed schools. They were what Grindle (2004 p. 15) described as "winners of prior contests over policy". That said there is little systematic analysis examining this issue in policy or research literature—a fact highlighted in the study of teacher unions in India's largest state of Uttar Pradesh by Kingdon and Muzammil (2003). Significantly, they note that "little is known about teacher-politics or the political economy of education in India" (Kingdon and Muzammil 2003 p. 7).

One of the first references to the discretionary role of teacher unions appears in the 1999 PROBE report. When discussing the issue of lack of teacher accountability, the report notes that a combination of poor managerial responsibility and organised resistance lies at the root of the problem. The report cites the example of time-bound promotions

³⁴ In the cases cited by Corrales (1999 p. 11), the Ministers of Education were selected from among politicians. In a number of instances union leaders had longer tenures than Ministers of Education.

³⁵ See Corrales (1999 p. 5) for details of the nature of "access" and "quality" related reforms and the opportunities for political patronage in access oriented reforms.

based on seniority rather than performance—a policy that was backed by the unions. This was a disincentive for good teachers as they were likely to be rewarded only as much as the bad ones. However, the alternative of using the conduct of individual teachers as the basis for promotion is also full of opportunity for political discretion. And the authors of the PROBE report note that given the circumstances, it is “understandable that teachers want to protect themselves from arbitrary treatment” (PROBE report 1999 p. 64). Therefore, and significantly, the observations of the PROBE report do not confirm theoretical expectations regarding the active protection of self-interest by teacher unions.

Many of the arguments about the formal political economy of teacher unions were first articulated by Kingdon and Muzammil (2003). Their work assesses the conflict of interest that makes teacher unions oppose educational reform. The authors adopt an historical and descriptive approach in order to highlight two aspects: (i) the political participation of teachers, and (ii) the mobilisation of their unions. They use a political economy framework, involving concepts like rent-seeking and principal-agent dilemmas in their analysis. From such a perspective, they argue that school teachers were extremely politicised in Uttar Pradesh—in large part because of a blurring of the boundary between the teaching profession and politics. This, they argue, was caused by the statutory provision for special representation of teachers in the upper house of the state assembly, plus the possibility that teachers from government-aided private schools could directly fight elections to the lower house (in contrast to the position of other government servants). Thus, teachers formed the base of political parties, and the authors cite discussions with noted researcher and activist, Jean Dreze, to highlight the fact that even the outcomes of elections could be influenced by teachers (Kingdon and Muzammil 2003 p.7). Further, union leaders had also been members of the council of ministers—popularly known as “the cabinet”. This too can be seen as a reflection of the union’s power being translated directly into political power. Clearly, it also diminishes the possibility of control against poor work practices like shirking and absenteeism.

A second line of argument addressed by Kingdon and Muzammil (2003) concerns the collective mobilisation of teachers to advance their material interests. In Uttar Pradesh, in the 1960s and 1970s strong powerful unions bargained for better salaries and service

conditions. High public expenditure on teacher salaries left little room for expenditure on improving educational quality or innovation. Another way in which teachers increased their power was by lobbying for private schools to be brought on the government's list for financial support in the form of "grant-in-aid". The government's resource support to grant-in-aid schools was direct—in the form of payment of salaries to teachers. This type of lobbying, therefore, ensured continued support to unions from teachers of private schools in anticipation of receiving higher salaries from the state exchequer (Kingdon and Muzzamil 2003 pp. 216–17). The authors see direct political participation of teachers, and lobbying by their unions, as being responsible for the evolution of teachers as a rent-seeking class, and a hindrance to educational reform.

However, on the present view two notable deficiencies appear in Kingdon and Muzzamil's arguments. First, they fail to provide complete evidence or analysis for their position that teachers can be seen as a "rent-seeking" class. Second, evidence from the field shows that teachers may be as much the victims of rent-seeking (and not its perpetrators alone), and that they too have to often pay money in order to obtain favourable postings (Béteille 2009 pp. 149–150; Ramachandran, Bhattacharjea, and Sheshagiri 2008 pp. 15–16; Sharma 2009 p. 162). Chand (2006 p. 21) too notes rent-seeking from teachers by some politicians to help fund elections. Also in this context, my field research, especially local evidence obtained from schools and communities, shows that rent-seeking in school education is a systemic issue—involving not just teachers, but other interests. In short, teachers are often victims of rent-seeking and they do not obviously form a class of rent-seekers.

The second gap is that according to Kingdon and Muzammil (2003 p. 9), a "principal-agent" dilemma is caused by the centralisation of school education where the government—which is akin to the "principal" in a contract—has little or no control over its "agents" (that is, the teachers). But the authors also note that decentralisation does not lead to a reversal of this process—neither better control of teachers nor a weakening of their political power resulted from decentralisation.

So Kingdon and Muzammil's overall perspective on the role of politics in bringing about educational reform remains somewhat negative in that they view politics as being

detrimental to achieving the goals of policy in the poorly performing state of Uttar Pradesh. On the other hand, Goyal's study (cited in Chand 2006 p. 41), which compares human development outcomes in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, shows that political support was a key factor behind the "success" in Tamil Nadu. In fact, Chand's work (2006) examines several cases of successful innovation in service delivery, and finds that politics played an important positive role. The aspects of politics he considers as crucial are the existence of: (i) a visionary political leadership, (ii) a consensus across party lines, (iii) a stable majority in the state assembly, and (iv) autonomy of administrators in implementing reforms. A later volume by Chand (2010) reiterates the important role of politics in improving service delivery, specifically the emergence of a coalition in support of reforms helps improve outcomes even in a backward state like Bihar.

2.3 Specific Reform Interventions: Decentralisation and Community Participation

Decentralisation is one of the most discussed themes among researchers who analyse the relationship between educational reform and politics. One reason for this is that decentralisation is a widely adopted reform measure, even when other complex types of reforms have been aborted. Moreover, it appeals to scholars across the ideological divide because of its wider promises of deepening democracy and increasing participation. There is also the theoretical possibility that decentralisation can promote efficiency by plugging information gaps and resolving principal-agent dilemmas. Such considerations have led to wide appeal and multi-dimensional expectations for decentralisation. This makes it difficult to formulate the parameters on which the vast literature that exists on the matter can be assessed. That said a useful starting point is Nelson's (2007 p. 86) observation that the technical effects of decentralisation on education (and health) have been analysed a lot, but there has been far less effort to assess how they affect the politics of institutional reform in the sector. In the light of this observation, I now specifically review the relevant literature in terms of the technical expectations and policy effects of this intervention, and the political factors associated with it.

In the formal political economy literature, educational decentralisation is viewed with optimism as an important intervention to “bolster the demand side”. It is seen as doing this through the dissemination of information, the greater participation of potential beneficiaries, and increasing the chances that difficult reforms are adopted (Corrales 1999). The 2004 World Development Report, which inspired a framework of service delivery, also sees in this measure the possibility of reversing the effects of centralisation on the education system—both by evolving short-chains of accountability over teachers and by resolving principal-agent dilemmas.

School Councils as a Measure to Promote Educational Decentralisation

The policy inclination in India towards decentralisation predates the emergence of a reform agenda; it also predates the provision of assistance for school reform by external agencies. This point can be seen in the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986. And it can also be seen in the Programme of Action (PoA) 1992 which envisaged that each *gram panchayat* should have a Village Education Committee (VEC) that would be responsible for the administration of delegated educational programmes at the village level. Since education is a concurrent responsibility of the states and the Centre, operationalising these central policy guidelines required agreement from the states. This came from the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) which provided detailed guidelines on decentralised management of education in 1993.³⁶ The federal guidelines for school policy reform, contained in these guidelines, gave concrete shape to what was already the practice in certain states (for example, Bihar and Rajasthan).³⁷ The 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1993 became the overarching framework for political decentralisation in the country. It also gave additional impetus to decentralisation in the school sector. One of the concrete forms that decentralisation took in various states was the setting up of school councils and village education committees with powers for school management and monitoring and, in some cases, powers for teacher recruitment and oversight.

³⁶ This committee consisted of the Ministers of Education of all the state governments and the central government.

³⁷ The Bihar Education Programme and the *Lok Jumbish* in Rajasthan were noted for their VECs and the high level of community mobilisation.

Much of the early literature on decentralisation conveys a general impression of optimism regarding the likely outcome of this reform intervention (Majumdar 2003; Varghese 1996). This literature also discusses a variety of policy designs adopted by different states (Pandey 2011; Priyam 2003). The focus in all of these studies is on design. They share the notion of reform as a technical intervention, with very little discussion of the politics surrounding it.

However, an explicit discussion of politics is evident in other literature that researches the local workings of VECs. Thus Wankhede and Sengupta (2005) studied the operation of four VECs in South 24 Pargana district of West Bengal. They found that the participation of poor people was constrained due to their weak capacity to challenge existing power structures. They conclude that field realities in West Bengal are contrary to the expectations of what might be gained from VECs. Thus, on the ground these village committees were only a “weak pressure-group”. Also, in a study in rural MP, Leclercq (2002) notes that the creation of new schools under the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) provided new opportunities for *sarpanches* to control both the use of funds (given to the *panchayats* for this purpose), and the employment of contract teachers (the power to appoint contract teachers was given to the *panchayats*). He notes the practice of bribery in the appointment of contract teachers and remarks that “[d]ecentralisation of teacher recruitments has led to decentralisation of corruption” (Leclercq 2002 p.71).

Corbridge et al. (2005) also observed the working of VECs. They found severe constraints to participation, and considerable limits to what the committees had achieved for education. Elite domination of the VECs by upper caste men and the heads of village *panchayats* (*mukhiyas*) was common. Scheduled Caste (SC) and female members of the committees were unaware of their status. And even where SC men and women participated actively in their VECs, their children were unable to attend schools. Based on these observations, the authors conclude that the “idea that ordinary villagers could take some control over educational issues, and in a sense therefore over the state, was grossly overstated” (Corbridge et al. 2005 p. 143).

Further, Corbridge and his colleagues find evidence of rent-seeking by the local state. For example, teachers paid bribes to the District Superintendent of Education, who was in-charge for Bidupur in Vaishali districts of Bihar. This was so that they (that is, the

teachers) could be posted out and could stay out of the purview of the VEC that was monitoring teacher attendance (Cobridge et al. 2005 p. 144). Based on these and other instances, the authors argue that ordinary poor people understood the local state in terms of their everyday, daily encounters (rather than through rhetorical ideologies of participation). They conclude that despite much talk about “participation”, most men and women continued to see the state at a distance, and through intermediaries.

Very few studies in this area employ quantitative methods. Banerjee, Banerji, Duflo, Glennerster, and Khemani (2008) are among the few who do in evaluating the role of participation in improving the quality of schools. Their study uses the experimental method. It tests some of the theoretical expectations generated by the formal political economy approach concerning improvements in the public education system due to the introduction of decentralisation and direct participation of citizens. Banerjee et al.’s study uses randomised evaluations. According to the researchers during the course of a baseline survey in Jaunpur district of Uttar Pradesh in 2005 they found that even four years after the launch of the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA),³⁸ people were generally unaware of the existence of VECs and they did not exercise the powers of school monitoring and management envisaged under the SSA programme.³⁹ Interestingly, this finding about the community not being aware of the existence of VECs, and not exercising its powers, has been confirmed by a number of other studies using both qualitative and quantitative methods (Priyam 2003; Srinivas Rao 2009).

The study by Banerjee et al. analyses three interventions designed and implemented by the non-governmental organisation PRATHAM to increase beneficiary control over schools. The experiments undertaken were intended to make “large group control” work better through mobilising local people, providing them with better information, making them aware of the importance of education and, finally, by translating their resulting heightened interest into coordinated action by means of a “small group direct control

³⁸ Launched in 2001, the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) was (and still is) the federal government’s flagship programme on elementary education.

³⁹ Ninety-two per cent of the parents responded that they did not know about any such committee (that is, the VEC), and only 3 per cent could name members of their own committee (Banerjee et al. 2008 p. 9).

strategy”.⁴⁰ Meetings were held with villagers; the villagers were trained to complete “learning report cards” (of students); and remedial classes were held with the help of local volunteers. The results from the evaluations of these three interventions showed that none of them helped people to gain either direct or indirect control over schools through the VECs. The authors conclude that these experiments failed to get the people involved with VECs. This may perhaps have been because people were sceptical regarding the outcomes. They did not believe that large group mechanisms would succeed: “if you do not believe that these mechanisms work, there is no reason to invest in them” (Banerjee et al. 2008 p. 9). Contrary to Coralles’s (1999) expectations that constraints on successful implementation of educational reform would be eased by bolstering the demand side through information campaigns and beneficiary participation, the results from this experiment confirm that more information does not always promote greater collective action.

Decentralised Recruitment of Teachers and “Para-teachers” on Contract

The appointment of para-teachers, or contract teachers, by various state governments at the implementation stage of reform also elicited discussion about the politics of educational reform. This issue brought together reform interventions on teachers and decentralisation because contract teachers were appointed by local authorities and school committees rather than by state governments (as applies in the case of regular teachers). As the states moved ahead with implementing reforms, one of the biggest challenges that they faced was the need for additional teachers to manage increased student enrolments. The problem was especially acute in the more populous BIMARU states, where the pressure of student numbers was immense largely due to an increase in educational participation.⁴¹ However, the severe lack of resources in these states constrained the hiring of new teachers. As a result, many of these states appointed teachers on a contract basis, generally at one-fourth

⁴⁰ The authors classify beneficiary control over education (or other development interventions) into different types by differentiating between the size of groups—large or small—and form of control—direct or indirect. Clearly, by using these features interventions can be classified on the basis of their design. However, there are trade-offs in adopting one or the other form, which are discussed in Banerjee et al. (2008 p. 3).

⁴¹ Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh all reported very low literacy rates in the 1991 Census. These states lagged behind on other social indicators as well. The term BIMARU has been widely used by researchers of education—examples being the PROBE report (1999) and Kingdon (2007).

or one-fifth of the salary paid to regular teachers (Kingdon and Sipahimalani-Rao 2010; Kumar, Priyam, and Saxena 2001b; Sharma and Ramachandran 2009).

The appointment of para-teachers was a response to the portrayal of teachers as being resistant to educational change in two ways. First, it was argued that the appointment of para-teachers was an efficiency measure—since the expenditure on regular teachers was very high, and contract teachers could assume similar responsibilities at a much lower cost. This reduction in expenditure on teachers was a particular incentive for cash-strapped states, where the employment of para-teachers proved to be an inexpensive method of reducing pupil teacher ratios (Gopalakrishnan and Sharma 1998, 1999; Kingdon and Sipahimalani-Rao 2010; PROBE Report 1999; Sharma and Ramachandran 2009). Second, appointing para-teachers was expected to weaken the strength of the unions by moving away from centralised recruitment to decentralised control exercised by *panchayats*. These two themes are asserted in many of the programme review reports and in the writings of education officers. Based on qualitative observations, para-teachers are claimed to perform better than regular teachers at a lower cost. It is also claimed that they attend school more regularly than full-time teachers (DPEP 1999b; Gopalakrishnan and Sharma 1998). However, Kumar, Priyam, and Saxena (2001b) criticise this policy; they see in this measure a shift of state policy towards encouraging privatisation. Relatedly, Leclercq (2002) notes that appointment of teachers on a contract basis in Madhya Pradesh did not necessarily lead to a better quality of educational provision.⁴² He observes a lack of motivation among para-teachers (as great as among regular teachers), and argues that the localised recruitment of the para-teachers, expected to be fairer than “centralised” recruitment, in fact favoured the appointment of powerful individuals rather than of motivated ones.

Quantitative survey data do not confirm that the quality of para-teachers is significantly superior to that of regular teachers (Kingdon and Sipahimalani-Rao 2010; NCAER 2008). Local micro-studies highlight two important aspects of the political dynamics surrounding policies dealing with para-teachers. These are: (i) the proliferation

⁴² There were three types of para-teachers in Madhya Pradesh—*shiksha karmis* (used in place of assistant teachers in government schools), *samvida shikshaks* (used in place of additional teachers in government schools), and *gurujis* (employed in new alternative education schools that were set up under the Education Guarantee Scheme).

of rent-seeking opportunities in appointments made by local *panchayats*, and (ii) related to this, the resulting poor quality of such teachers (Leclercq 2002; Zachariah and Pandey 2007). Leclercq's (2002) work is notable here since it is based on field-work in two districts of MP which was the first state under the DPEP to make significant amendments to its teacher recruitment regulations and adopt large-scale decentralisation in its recruitment policies. Regular teachers (known as "assistant teachers" in government schools) were declared to be a "dying cadre" in 1995. As a result, contract teachers were recruited on a large scale following the introduction of decentralised recruitment policies. Leclercq notes that the bargaining power of teachers diminished significantly after this change, although teachers continued to think of themselves as "civil-servants". However, many para-teachers appointed initially as assistant teachers in MP approached the courts requesting that their status be changed to that of regular teachers through judicial intervention; furthermore, other categories of para-teachers were likely to do the same because they all saw themselves as civil servants. Sharma and Ramachandran (2009 p. 318), note that in the hiring of para-teachers with the help of the community, there has been a "deformalisation" of the recruitment process, leading to more opportunities for patronage-based appointments.

It is interesting to note that in Clarke and Jha's (2006 pp. 225–65) article on service delivery in education, based on innovations in two projects in Rajasthan, the authors refer to the importance of community control and the use of para-teachers on the grounds that a teacher's roots in the community are more important than her formal educational qualifications. Clarke and Jha support this model as being efficient from the viewpoint of helping reduce teacher costs and increasing the efficiency of service delivery. The authors note that in the *Shiksha Karmi* project in Rajasthan "lies the genesis of 'para-teacher' now adopted by several states across India" (Clarke and Jha 2006 p. 237). While this approach facilitated an expansion of the primary school system at a low cost in Rajasthan, and the authors note that the achievement of children in these schools was comparable to those in regular schools, there is little quantitative evidence to show that local control has led to enhanced accountability (either in Rajasthan or elsewhere).

Kremer et al.'s (2005) study finds no conclusive evidence that contract teachers exhibit less absenteeism as compared to regular teachers, or that community control enhances overall educational effectiveness. Kingdon and Sipahimalani-Rao (2010) review further literature on the subject, and observe that in AP, MP, and Uttar Pradesh, para-teachers appear to be more regular in attendance compared to tenured teachers. In Bihar, however, there is no such difference. But the authors also point to a significant qualification—namely that regular teachers are absent from school largely on account of “official duties away from school” and entitled leave, as opposed to unauthorised absence. Authorised leave, according to the authors, was the chief reason why the regular teachers were away from school (Kingdon and Sipahimalani-Rao 2010 p. 62). It is notable that the literature fails to support some of the conventional formal political economy assumptions—such as that decentralised control over teachers would reduce problems of accountability, and that less security of tenure for teachers would improve the quality of their performance. That said, there is widespread agreement that the hiring of para-teachers has enabled the expansion of the school system in India at a relatively low cost.

2.4 Lessons from the Literature Review on the Two Reform Interventions

How Interests and Institutions are Viewed

Assumptions about teacher interests being a major constraint to reform that can be overcome by augmenting the demand side through decentralisation and community participation are simply not borne out by research and evidence on teachers, their unions, and school decentralisation. While the poor quality of teaching and the demoralisation of teachers are widely accepted, arguments about teacher unions and the direct political power of teachers constituting the cause of these problems are not supported by the evidence and data. I concur with Béteille (2009), that measurement of teachers' political affiliations, or union power in a quantitative way is very difficult, as teachers are unlikely to be willing to reveal their affiliations. The qualitative literature focuses on both these issues, but it does not show agreement as to whether teachers alone are responsible for the poor quality of schools. The institutional literature (Sharma 2000) highlights some of the

structural reasons for this poor quality of educational provision—mainly unprofessional and weak institutional support at the district and sub-district levels—but it is unable to inform us as to how change can be brought about.

While school decentralisation and community participation have been widely promoted as policy measures both at the central and state levels, their contribution to improving school quality and efficiency has not been on the scale that was expected on the basis of theory. In the course of implementing reforms, states have used this aspect of policy to innovate and introduce divergent approaches for improving their schools. For instance, MP's Education Guarantee Scheme was a demand led strategy aimed at providing basic education at a low cost (Gopalakrishnan and Sharma 1998; Pandey 2011; Ramachandran 2001). Community participation is affirmed by all as a normative goal, a good in itself. But its justification in terms of enhancing the efficiency of schools, or poor people's control over the schooling process, is more tenuous.

How Politics is Viewed

The preceding review suggests that arguments using the formal political economy approach and a more historical approach are both inclined towards seeing politics in terms of existing interests, and seeing institutions as constraints to change. Attention to successful cases of reforms is generally of very recent vintage, and it has mainly been done by Chand (2006, 2010). In analysing successful cases, Chand regards the role of the political leader, nature of reform ideas, and the existence of bipartisan politics, as all being critical. What is still missing is an analysis of variations in outcomes between different states.

One of the important contributions of both local political studies (for example, Corbridge et al. 2005) and the service delivery framework (for example, Devarajan and Shah 2004) is the focus on how schools work at the local level. Among the earliest research on the local impact of central educational reform is that of Dyer (1999). She examines the working of the central scheme Operation Blackboard (OB) in selected districts of Gujarat, and notes that there is a gap between what the central policies intend and the actual outcomes at the school level. She sees this as a result of discretionary action

of teacher trainers and implementers, plus the absence of teacher involvement in the overall design process. Political dynamics at the local level are hardly mentioned in Dyer's work. Two distinct approaches to local political dynamics are evident in the work of Corbridge and colleagues (2005) and that of Devarajan and Shah (2004). For Corbridge et al. (2005), the local arena as seen around schools is an explicitly political one, and conflict marks the interactions between community members, teachers, and agents of the state. Using the World Development Report–2004's (World Bank 2003a) approach, Devarajan and Shah (2004) view education as a service and note that "services" fail the poor in India very often.⁴³ This was evident in large-scale absenteeism among teachers (seen as service providers). Poor people lack an effective voice, and they do not have real power to monitor the service providers. Devarajan and Shah (2004) call for remedial action by altering the state-citizen control at the local level, and providing a direct contract between citizens (who are like "customers" in a market place) and teachers (who are the service providers). While Corbridge et al. (2005) view the local dynamics as being those of intense conflict, where agents of the state play a partisan role, a situation which could be remedied only by a greater presence of the state, Devarajan and Shah (2004) argue for changes in design leading to a reduced role for the state. Where the two perspectives converge is in their emphasis on the importance of politics around schools at the grassroots level.

This emphasis on local political dynamics in the research literature on the working of social sector reforms in India is very distinct from the equivalent literature on the experience of Latin America and Africa. In the latter, the political dynamics of educational reform are described in terms of "external control" on policies and resources for education. Budgets for education and training shrank in most parts of Africa and Latin America in the structural adjustment period of the 1980s, leading to severe pressures within the education sector. For instance, there was a decline in real education expenditure per student, a reduction in capital expenditure, and a freeze on teacher salaries (Samoff 1994 pp. 5–11). Many countries sought to overcome the problem by restructuring their policies for education, especially by increasing the efficiency of their resource use and mobilising new

⁴³ The authors speak of education, health, water, sanitation, and electricity as services that have the most direct link with human development, and therefore are in need of priority attention in making services work for the poor. However, the article places most attention on health and education.

resources from external aid. However, there was domination by external aid agencies in this process, leading to a process of dependent national development. Thus, Takala (1998) notes that educational policy in many African countries was being made under a considerable degree of external influence—particularly in the countries that were subject to structural adjustment programmes. He also notes that domestic political conditions such as multi-party competition and socialist ideologies had an influence on policy. For Samoff (1999) the external control of educational policies seemed to be of a very high order. Based on a review of sector studies for education in Africa in the 1990s, he concludes that there was a “lack of national participation, ownership and control” in these studies (and thereby on the policies that they influenced), and these studies supported perpetuating the aid relationship in African countries. (Samoff 1999 p. 249). The theoretical approach of the dependency theory was influential in this genre of writing—articulating ideas about external control of reform policies, and perpetuating a model of dependent development in countries on the “periphery”.

These ideas had considerable influence on my earlier thinking on the politics of educational reform in India. Indeed, the article I co-authored with Krishna Kumar and Sadhna Saxena (Kumar et al. 2001a) articulated these views and saw the DPEP policy measures as having been taken under external influence. However, I now see this view as having overly relied on the “external” determinants of policy as defining the political dynamics of educational reform, and for having neglected the dynamic process of reform implementation in India’s states. It is the variety of approaches that these states adopted towards educational policy reform, alongside the dynamics of competitive politics, that I now seek to explore.

2.5 Research Methodology

Main Features

Given India's federal framework, and the complexity of policy reform in the education sector, an appropriate methodology was needed to address the following two challenges. First, there was a need to focus on the implementation process, and not just on the policy-design stage and the outcomes. Focusing only on policy-design and outcomes was likely to convey the impression that reform was in fact some kind of a technical plan, for which the implementation phase was merely akin to "a brief pause between a shiny idea and smart delivery" (Dyer 1999 p. 46). This perception of reform as a technical plan was dominant in the literature, and in the past it had resulted in a lack of attention to and very meagre literature on implementation (Dyer 1999 p. 46; Grindle and Thomas 1991 p.121). In understanding policy change as a contested process, each phase—planning, implementing, and sustaining of arrangements on the ground—constitutes a different arena for conflict between contending ideas, actors, and institutions. It is not simply the unfurling of a technical plan. In this context, once the need to focus on the implementation process is agreed, Dyer lays emphasis on the requirement "to develop methodological approaches that allow accumulation of relevant information ... [to] be compared and contrasted across different contexts" (Dyer 1999 p. 46).

Second, there is a need for an explicit focus on what is happening at the local level. This is because policy reforms have arisen precisely because of problems at this level. Moreover, the local level is where the ultimate benefits of policy change are hopefully to be seen. I have already remarked on the increasing emphasis in recent research on studying the local consequences of policy reforms and interrogating what is happening to schools, teachers, and communities.

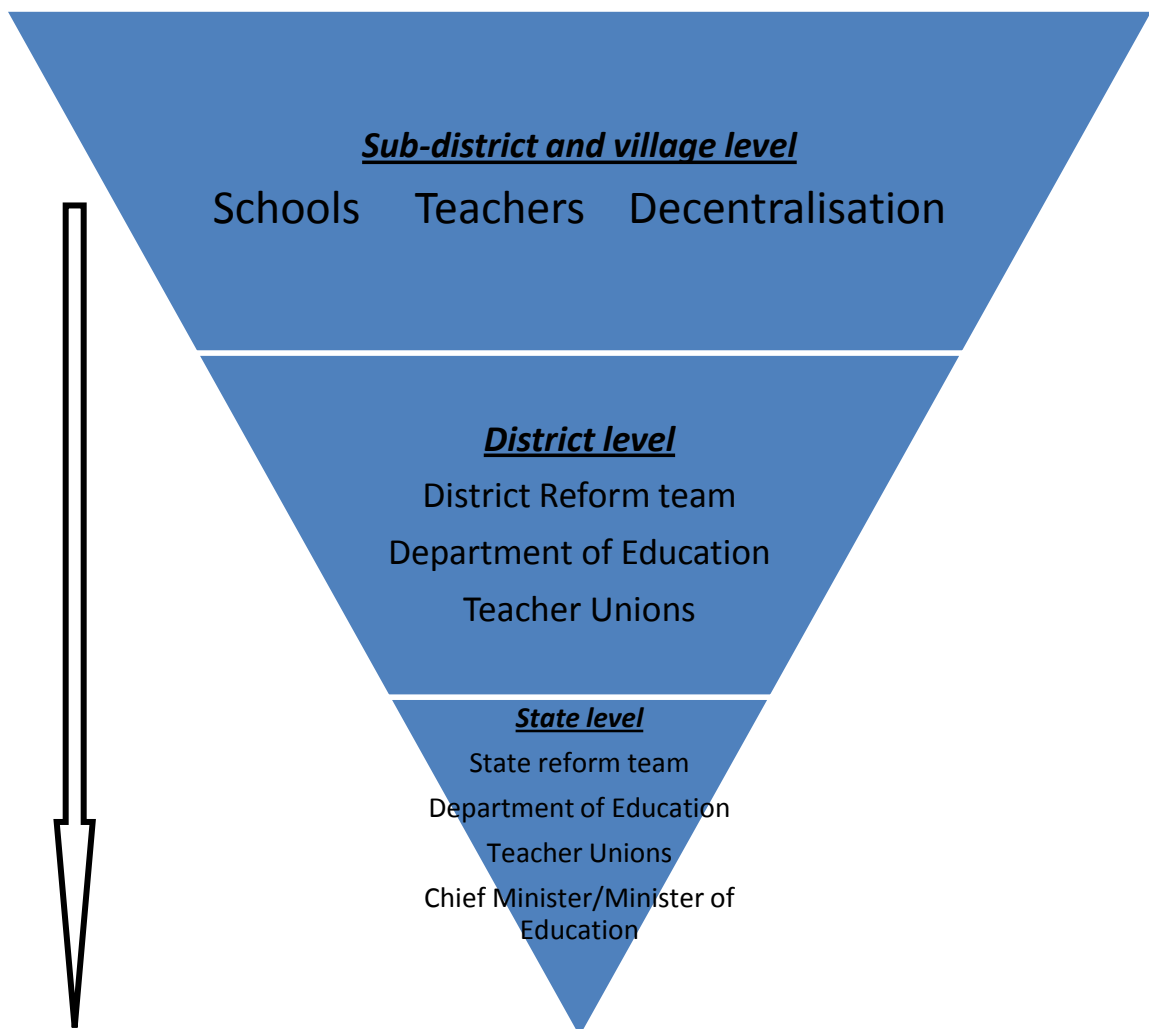
Bearing these things in mind, for this research I have adapted Grindle's perspective of viewing educational policy reform as constituting a complex chain of policy decisions and implementation within India's federal political system. This involves taking account of both central and local level variables. The "central level" here includes actions emanating in the federal government and in state capitals. At this level, ideas for change emerge, policies are formulated, and resource support is mobilised. I look at the key variables that are important for bringing about these changes—namely the actions of political leaders, policymakers, experts, and leaders of teacher unions.⁴⁴ The changes emanating from the federal government relate mainly to setting out the policy directions within which states can initiate new activities. At the state level, the actions relate to some redesign of policy, but within federal guidelines. The main activity at the state level is initiating the process of implementation of policies. The "local level" refers primarily to the implementation chain below the state capital, that is, districts, sub-district units (blocks), and villages. At this level, schools, decentralised bodies, and the local state interact, and teachers, communities, and local politicians are the important actors.

The implementation of reform policies is an interactive and contested process involving mostly these various institutions and actors. Relevant interaction can only be seen in specific arenas of the working of policies. I have selected three important arenas of policy implementation: (i) teacher policies, (ii) decentralisation and community participation, and (iii) the working of schools on the ground. Figure 2.1 illustrates this interactive process beginning from local institutions and actors at the village and block levels and moving upwards to the state level. Below the state level, all the district level field work referred to in this thesis was conducted in two selected districts in each state (giving a total of four selected districts across AP and Bihar).

⁴⁴ Teacher unions had no role to play at the Centre, but they were important in the states.

At the sub-district level, field work was undertaken in two sub-district units of each district (these are called “*mandal*” in AP and “block” in Bihar). Thus a total of eight units across AP and Bihar were covered in this way. The principle used to select the districts was that of contrasting educational indicators—in this case from clusters of districts with literacy rates that were higher and lower than state averages. The selection process for the districts and sub-district units within them is described in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Figure 2.1: Actors and Institutions in the Reform Implementation Process in Indian States



Note: The downward pointing arrow indicates the direction of moving from the field sites to the consideration of variables that work at the central level.

Specific Tools Used

Within a research design which was essentially that of qualitative analysis of policies and observing their field-level outcomes, the research tools employed were a mix of qualitative approaches and analysis of descriptive data. The qualitative tools used were interviews, focus group discussions, and school observations. The data analysis included examining the public expenditure of the federal and state governments, school participation reports from national surveys (from the 1990s until the present), and a primary survey conducted in schools and households in the selected districts. Details of the tools, sampling strategy, and respondents are provided in the Research Methods Appendix (*Appendix I*).

Secondary Data Sources

Data on public expenditure on education by the federal government and the states for the period between 1990–91 and 2007–08 were analysed for two reasons. First, to highlight the federal government’s role in laying down the agenda for, and stimulating reforms in, the states. Second, this analysis was done to compare differences in the performance of states that have been classified as being “educationally backward” and those that are not in this category. Data from various rounds of the National Sample Survey (NSS)—specifically the 50th–64th rounds, covering the period 1993–94 and 2007–08—were examined in order to compare the nature of educational participation in Bihar and AP over nearly two decades of reform implementation. These data are analysed in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively.

The richest source of insight and information for this research came from interviews. I conducted these at the national, state, district, and sub-district levels in order to elicit responses from policymakers and institutional and political actors. At the national and state levels, key informants from among policymakers and experts involved in formulating the design of educational reform were interviewed by me with the help of individual interview guides developed for each respondent. I identified the key persons to be interviewed following discussions with state reform teams in Hyderabad and Patna, and the non-governmental organisation, the MV Foundation, in Hyderabad. The subjects on

which information was elicited from these informants, included aspects of the design of reform policies—specifically with respect to teachers and decentralisation, and on the implementation of the reforms involving a contest or interaction between newly established reform teams, the traditional departments of education, and teacher unions in the states (see *Appendix 1A* for details). The information gathered from national level experts and policymakers is used in Chapter 3, and that from state level experts and policymakers is used in Chapters 4–7. The list of people interviewed (at both the national and state levels) is provided in *Appendix 2*.

I also conducted structured interviews with a second set of actors. These were political actors—the leaders of teacher unions at state, district, and sub-district levels. The names of the key primary teacher unions and their state level leaders were collected from the government’s Department of Education (DoE), and from informal discussions with the *Panchayati Raj* Teacher Union leaders in Ranga Reddy district in AP during field visits in 2005.⁴⁵ The themes on which information was collected included union-government relationships, especially in addressing teachers’ grievances, their political affiliations, and finally their identification with the educational reform process. Representatives of each of the primary teacher unions were interviewed at the state, district, and wherever available, at the sub-district *mandal*/block levels. The information from these interviews is used in Chapter 5, and the list of union leaders interviewed is provided in *Appendix 3*.

Additional interviews were conducted at the district and sub-district levels with district reform team officers, *mandal*/block education department officers, political representatives (for example, Members of the Legislative Assembly or Members of Parliament), *panchayat* leaders, and teachers in selected districts. These have been used for the analysis in Chapter 7, and the list of persons interviewed is provided in *Appendix 4*.

⁴⁵ Field testing of primary survey questionnaires for schools and households was done in Ranga Reddy district in June 2005. During this visit, I had discussions with *Panchayati Raj* Teachers’ Union leaders in the district in order to formulate structured interview guides for teacher union leaders and gather the names and contact details of other primary school teacher unions. Since Bihar had very few unions, such a detailed exercise was not required; information provided by the state reform team—the Bihar Education Project office—was sufficient.

Quantitative and Qualitative Data from Selected Field Sites

Primary data was collected from households and schools in selected field sites in both states. This was done to understand the implementation of reforms at the local level, the relationships between the various actors, and outcomes in terms of school participation. Data were collected using separate questionnaires for households and schools. These data are used for the analysis in Chapter 7. Field sites were selected from two districts in each state. As noted, these districts were selected from districts having literacy rates higher and lower than the state average in 1991. The districts selected were East Godavari and Mahabubnagar in AP, and Gaya and Purnia in Bihar. Further, two *mandals*/blocks were selected in each district using exactly the same principle. Thus, a two-stage selection process was used in each state to first identify the districts and then the *mandals* and blocks within them. In summary, a total of four districts and eight blocks were selected in this way. In East Godavari the *mandals* selected were Razule and Prathipadu, and in Mahabubnagar the *mandals* were Jadcherla and Dharur. In Bihar's Gaya district the blocks selected were Belaganj and Fatehpur; and in Purina district they were Baysi and Kasba (see *Appendix 1D* for details).

In order to compare aspects of design and the working of school decentralisation and community participation, I held focus group discussions with members of school committees in three randomly selected villages in each selected *mandal*/block in the two states. A list of these villages is provided in *Appendix 5*. The participants were identified from information about members and office bearers of these committees that was available in school records. Members were contacted in advance by the school committee office bearers, teachers, and/or by members of my research team to participate; special efforts were made to encourage women and members of disadvantaged social castes to take part in the study. Further, the discussions were held in the latter half of the day after school hours were over. The themes on which the discussions were held included the election process for committees, the participatory nature of their meetings, their involvement in school affairs, and the sense that the community had about the difference that increased

participation was making to schools (see *Appendix IE* for a detailed list of the themes). The responses of participants were recorded in writing and later tabulated for each of the themes. The thematic tabulation of this information highlighted the variety (or uniformity) between districts of the same state and differences across the two states.

2.6 Conclusion

I expect that this research will serve two purposes. First, it will test the assertion of conventional theory about the negative role that politics and special interests play as constraints to reform. It will accomplish this by examining relevant evidence in this regard—in particular the role of teacher unions, the attitude of teachers to reform, and of reform strategies with respect to teachers. I examine whether the weaker educational outcomes in Bihar were due to strong opposition from teachers' vested interests and the collective action of their unions, as compared to better outcomes in AP possibly being attributed to the weaker capacity of teacher unions to oppose policy changes. Second, the research also examines the empirical evidence on demand side interventions—especially decentralisation and community participation—viewed in the formal political economy approach as correctives to the negative influence of vested interest. In this regard, I examine how far the better outcomes in AP can be attributed to greater decentralisation and community participation; I also consider whether the weak outcomes in Bihar were due to a lack of community control and participation. These key issues are examined in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively. To further highlight the nature of working of vested interests, political actors, teachers, and community participation, I examine reform results on the ground—that is, how schools function after a decade of effort to bring about change in Chapter 7.

In all this, my objective is to understand the specific “analytical biases” around formal political economy approaches, which lead to inferences about a “negative role” of politics. My own understanding of politics is that of its being a process of contestation, and accordingly I look at each of the reform interventions as dynamic arenas. Interest and institutions may indeed have played a constraining role. However, the focus of my work is on why things improve, even in the face of these formidable impediments.

Chapter 3

Setting the Agenda: The Federal Context of Educational Reform in India

By the 1990s, India's school education sector was in dire need of a new direction with respect to both policy and operational programmes. The challenges were indeed formidable, because the country was home to the world's largest number of "out of school" children. Moreover, school participation was characterised by deep inequities based on social-caste and gender. The problems were concentrated in six of the educationally backward states of the country, which included the populous north Indian states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh—popularly known as the "BIMARU" states—and in Andhra Pradesh (AP) and West Bengal.⁴⁶ To make matters worse, while the quality of learning was widely perceived to be poor, there was little knowledge of the actual level of learning. Sustained and deliberate efforts to change existing policies and institutional constraints were required in order to address these issues. Given the complexity of India's federal structure and anticipated resistance from certain vested interests and institutions (discussed in Chapter 2), this was a challenging task.

In all fairness, there was some recognition of a number of these issues in federal policy documents, especially the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986, and of the need for reform: "Education in India stands at a cross roads today. Neither normal linear expansion nor the existing pace and nature of improvement can meet the needs of the situation" (NPE 1986 p. 2).

⁴⁶ The concept of "educationally backward states" was used frequently in the policy literature after 1978, and in the research literature since the 1990s. The Planning Commission's working group set up in 1978 observed that 74 per cent of the non-enrolled children were in the "educationally backward states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal". In her analysis of educational finances in the 1990s, Bashir (2000 p. 25) includes the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh as being educationally backward. The states that I have considered as educationally backward follow from Bashir's list. All of these states had literacy rates lower than the national average in 1991 (see Table 3.1).

Yet, the adoption of an agenda for change could not arise from a simple recognition of these problems, or from an “idea whose time had come.”⁴⁷ There was a process by which these issues gained salience, choices were made between various alternative reform directions, and the policy reform agenda was concretised. Each step in this process was political—in that it was characterised by contesting ideas and actors, with reformers identifying the possible sources of resistance and attempting to find room for manoeuvre.

In this chapter, I delineate this process in terms of the specific “problems, policies, and politics”⁴⁸ that were dealt with at this stage in the development of India’s education sector, and how priorities were set for educational reform. In the federal distribution of powers with respect to education, it was the Centre that played the role of a reform leader, setting the agenda and the basic parameters of a technical design. I maintain that in playing this role, skilful negotiations at the Centre were responsible for overcoming many of the institutional constraints in adopting educational reform and in further enhancing these possibilities by creating special opportunities and incentives for states (which had the responsibility of implementing the reforms). I also examine how states differed in their use of these opportunities. The findings of this chapter highlight the similarity of the policy context within which reforms were undertaken in the states. In Chapters 4–7, I study how these reforms were implemented in the educationally backward states of AP and Bihar.

This chapter has five sections. In the first, I provide an overview of the conditions that characterised the national education system in the early 1990s; this is based on empirical data on selected indicators of educational attainment. The overview provides the context in which educational reform was undertaken. In the next section, I analyse the role of the Centre in the emergence of reforms. Educational policies were reorganised not simply because the problems were severe, but also on account of specific actions of the Centre, especially in the wake of the economic crisis of 1991. These actions by the Centre included its role in managing contending ideas about educational reform, reorganising its

⁴⁷ Kingdon (1995 p.1) uses this famous phrase of Victor Hugo to illustrate the process by which issues gain salience in the public domain, and differentiates this from the distinct process by which they get on to the agenda of the government.

⁴⁸ I cite from Kingdon (1995 p. 16) who considers these three elements as important in understanding the process by which agendas are set and alternative choices among them are specified.

own policy priorities, mobilising greater investment for school education, and undertaking strategic negotiations with external agencies. The main data used here relate to educational finances for the Centre covering 1990–91 and 2007–08, official policy documents on educational reform, and interviews with policymakers and experts at the national level.

In section 3, I evaluate the actions of the Centre in formulating new rules—the new policies that constitute “reform” as compared to the “old” set of policies. These new policies evolved over a period of more than a decade (1986 to 2001–02). I classify them in three broad phases based on differences in their vision for change, and the opportunities and incentives in each distinctive set of reform proposals for the Centre and the states.⁴⁹ While programmes initiated in the first phase (1986–2000) marked the beginning of the educational reform process, they worked around inflexible, centrally driven norms. I argue that policies in the second phase (1993- until the present) provided state governments with a special opportunity to innovate on their own terms. In the next section, I examine some aspects of the variations in the performance of different states, indicated mainly in terms of their expenditure on elementary education. I focus on the performance of educationally backward states. The main source of data for this section relate to educational finances for 15 major states between 1990–91 and 2007–08, and official documents on educational reform in the states from the 1990s. Section 5 concludes by discussing the key features of the political dynamics observed during the phase of agenda setting.

3.1 Problems and Constraints in India’s School Education Sector

Main Problems: Low Levels of Participation and Deep Inequities

India’s education sector could boast two notable achievements by the early 1990s: the availability of a large infrastructure for schooling, and the existence of a large number of people with secondary and higher education. Yet indicators of basic educational attainment

⁴⁹ There is some difficulty in classifying the three phases into neat categories of time. This is because although the policy decisions and specific programmes in each phase were initiated in chronological order, changes initiated in an earlier phase were not discontinued or abandoned even when policy priorities subsequently shifted. This led to an overlap—for example the domestically funded and centrally sponsored schemes of Operation Blackboard and Teacher Education continued even after the externally funded District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) had been launched, marking what I have termed the second phase.

presented a picture of very modest achievements. In 1991, adult literacy rates (for persons over 7 years of age) were just 52 per cent. Though this was much higher than the level reached at the time of independence in 1947 (about 15 per cent)⁵⁰ it was less than the literacy rates in East Asian countries when they started their integration with world markets. For example, in 1961 South Korea had a literacy rate of 71 per cent and Thailand a rate of 68 per cent (World Bank 1997 p.15). In 1991, India's literacy rates were closer to the figures for sub-Saharan Africa (50.3 per cent) and the Arab states (51.2 per cent) (Grindle 2004 p. 29).

The advances in literacy rates notwithstanding, the total number of illiterates had grown very large. In 1981, there were 121 million non-literate males and 181 million non-literate females. By 1991 these figures had increased to 127 million non-literate males and 197 million non-literate females (World Bank 1997 p.16). To add to the complexity of the situation, there were large variations within the country. In Kerala, for instance, literacy rates were close to 90 per cent, and they exceeded 60 per cent in the three advanced states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu. In contrast, in all of the educationally backwards states, less than half the population was literate (see Table 3.1).

Enrolment at the primary education level, comprising grades I–V in most states (and grades 1–IV in a few) had grown steadily since independence. The Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) for the primary stage (reported by the government and unadjusted for age) was 101 per cent in 1990–91. However, the GER was not a good indicator of school participation, as the government's figures underestimated the size of the child population aged 6–10 years and they over-estimated enrolment by including both underage and overage children. As can be seen from Table 3.1, the GER was reportedly higher than 100 per cent in 10 of the 15 major states, including the educationally backward ones of AP, MP, and Orissa. Nevertheless, despite its limitations, the officially reported GER highlighted two major problems. First, the gender disparity in enrolment was significant, especially in the educationally backward states. Thus, in Bihar and Rajasthan the GER for girls was only about half that for boys. Second, the GER for middle school (grades VI–

⁵⁰ Literacy rates for India are cited from "Literacy Scenario in India: 1951–1991", Government of India. Available at the Ministry of Human Resource Development's website: <http://www.education.nic.in/cd50years/y/3T/9U/3T9U0301.htm>

VIII) was much lower than the primary GER, indicating that not many children were able to complete elementary schooling.⁵¹

A more realistic picture was presented by the school participation rates reported by the National Sample Survey (NSS) which involves representative household surveys for each state. In 1993–94, the participation rate for primary school age children (that is, those aged 6–10 years) was 71.7 per cent; this was 30 percentage points lower than the official GER at the all-India level. Nearly one in three children of primary school age was not enrolled in school. Gender disparities were the greatest in Bihar, MP, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh—all of these were states reporting very low literacy rates in 1991, and they had the lowest rates for primary school participation in 1993–94 (see Table 3.1).

While the data on literacy rates and school participation at the primary stage provided an estimate of what the deficits were, there was little information available on how the government's efforts to deal with these challenges could be estimated. Data on public spending on elementary education, which are indicative of the government's effort at this educational level, provide one possible way (of estimating government efforts). However, these showed wide variation across states, including among the states classified as "educationally backward". The lowest expenditures were in the educationally backward states of AP, MP, and Orissa, and also in West Bengal, which was not at this time classified as an educationally backward state. All these states reported a per-pupil expenditure of less than Rs 600 per year, in nominal terms.⁵² Further, evidence of the variety came from the fact that this low per-pupil expenditure in these three educationally backward states (and West Bengal), was less than half of what was reported for some of the other states, notably Haryana and Kerala—both reported per-pupil nominal expenditure per year to be nearly Rs 1,200 in 1990–91. Among the educationally backward states, the

⁵¹ In 1990–91, at the all-India level, the GER for primary stage education (grades I–V) was reported at 101 per cent, while for the middle school stage (classes VI–VIII) it was only 60.11 per cent (Source: "Selected Educational Statistics 1990–91", Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India, p. 27, Table VI).

⁵² Bashir (2000 p. 33) notes that levels of per-pupil expenditure in the states are dependent on the pupil-teacher ratio, teacher salaries, and non-teacher costs. Since the last item is very small, the main difference is due to variation in the other two components. Bashir too notes that in 1990–91, per-pupil expenditure was low in the educationally backward states, with the exception of Rajasthan. This state had high per-pupil expenditure in this year, and this remained so in relation to the other educationally backward states even at the end of the decade.

higher per-pupil expenditure in Rajasthan was an anomaly; Bihar and Uttar Pradesh too had low literacy rates and primary school participation rates, but their per-pupil expenditure in nominal terms were not among the lowest (see Table 3.1).

Another important indicator was the priority that spending on elementary education had in the budget of a state. The percentage share of the state's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) being spent on elementary education, was indicative of this. However, even here there was no consistent explanation. In Table 3.1, we can see that while Bihar is the state with the lowest literacy rates, its elementary education expenditure as a proportion of the state's GDP is the same as that for Kerala, the state reporting the highest literacy rate in the country. Both states spent nearly 2.8 per cent of their GDP on elementary education. So, while the government's data on educational participation and household surveys showed where the deficits were, its data on public expenditure was unable to provide a consistent explanation as to its causes.

The problems were said to lie elsewhere—in the domain of institutions, interests, and ideas, all of these working as impediments to change.

Table 3.1: Educational Achievement and Deficits in 15 Major States, 1990–91

State	Literacy Rate	Gross Enrolment Rate	School Participation (6–10 years)			Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR)	Public Expenditure on Elementary Education	
	Total	Total	Male	Female	Total	Total	As % of GSDP	Per-Pupil Expenditure in Rs (Nominal Values)
Educationally Backward States								
Andhra Pradesh	44.08	107.3	79.3	66.6	72.8	53	1.3	582
Bihar	37.49	81.7	62.2	45	54.9	50	2.8	758
Madhya Pradesh	44.67	103.9	67.7	55.6	62	42	1.7	522
Orissa	38.55	102.5	73.6	62.7	68.3	35	2.2	532
Rajasthan	49.09	78	73.5	43.5	59.9	42	2.1	836
Uttar Pradesh	40.71	81.4	71.9	52.1	63	51	2.2	729
Other States								
Assam	52.89	111.8	80.3	77.6	79.1	40	2.3	614
Gujarat	61.29	122.8	83.5	74.8	79.4	36	1.7	664
Haryana	55.85	83.6	85	78.4	82	45	1.1	1,239
Karnataka	56.04	108	83.5	75.9	79.7	46	1.7	591
Kerala	89.81	102.5	96	96.3	96.2	32	2.8	1,230
Maharashtra	64.87	123.2	88.8	82.9	86	39	1.1	670
Punjab	58.51	95.8	86.1	81.5	84	39	N.A.	N.A.
Tamil Nadu	62.66	134	92.2	86.2	89.3	45	2	739
West Bengal	57.7	125.3	73.2	67.4	70.4	41	1.4	557
All-India	52.21	101	77	65.6	71.7	42		

Sources: Literacy Rate: Census of India, 1991; Gross Enrolment Rate from "Select Educational Statistics", Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD), Government of India (Gol) 1990–91; School participation rates are calculated from National Sample Survey 1993–94; Pupil-teacher ratio is calculated from "Select Educational Statistics", MoHRD, 1990–91; Public expenditure is calculated from the "Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure in Education", MoHRD, Gol.

Notes: 1. Literacy rate is reported for 1991; Public expenditure on education, GER, and PTR are reported for 1990–91; School participation rates are reported for 1993–94. 2. The gross enrolment ratio, school participation rates, and pupil-teacher ratio are reported for the primary stage, normally covering grades I–V and the age group 6–10 years. 3. Public expenditure on education is reported for the elementary stage, normally covering grades I–VIII and the age group 6–14 years, as budget classification in India is provided for the elementary stage alone.

Definitions: 1. Literacy rate is defined for population above 6 years of age; 2. Gross enrolment rate is defined as the ratio of total enrolment in grades I–V to the child population aged 6–10 years expressed in percentage terms. 3. School participation rate is defined as the percentage of children aged 6–10 years attending any type of educational institution. 4. Nominal expenditure on elementary education per student is in rupees and at current prices.

Institutional Constraints

In the early 1990s, state governments were spending nearly a fifth of their budgets on education. And in most of the major states around half or more of the total educational expenditure was incurred just on elementary education.⁵³ Yet the opportunities for initiating renewal were severely constrained as most of the available resources were spent on paying teacher salaries and those of the staff in the large educational bureaucracies. Also, there were limits to increasing non-salary outlays in view of the severe fiscal crises that were being faced by state governments.⁵⁴ Equally important, there were few ideas for change within state governments, and there was a widespread fear of opposition from teacher unions.

The Centre in Delhi, on the other hand, had both the resources and the ideas for change. That said school education was not the Centre's priority—because a major share of its budget was spent on university and higher education. Besides, principal-agent problems—which had been exacerbated by the federal division of power and competitive politics since the late 1980s—plagued the relationship between the Centre and the states. These problems were evident in the inefficiencies of an earlier generation of centrally sponsored schemes (like Operation Blackboard) which had weak attraction for the states because such schemes imposed recurrent financial liabilities on state governments, and involved no accountability for the Centre. Politically, with the breakdown of the one-party dominant system in the early 1990s, the Congress Party in Delhi had to be more sensitive

⁵³ Among the major states the notable exception was West Bengal which spent a lower proportion of its budget on elementary education. In 1990–91 and 1995–96, the proportion of educational expenditure on elementary education in the state was only 35 per cent. A majority of the 15 major states spent about half or more of their education budgets on elementary education. Data on this are provided on a compact disc accompanying the thesis.

⁵⁴ In 1990–91, the combined fiscal deficit of the Centre and the states was nearly 9.3 per cent of GDP, and much of the deficit originated in the states. That is, states relied heavily on borrowing. Bagchi (2001 p. 52) estimates that in 1990–91, the internal debt of states was 56 per cent of GDP, and total debt was slightly higher, at 62 per cent. This situation regarding state finances continued in the 1990s, despite attempts at macro-management by the Centre and structural adjustment policies. As a result, the interest burden on state budgets rose sharply in the 1990s, accounting for nearly 16 per cent of the revenue receipts in several states (Bagchi 2001 p. 16).

to the interests of regional and other parties, whose support it might need.⁵⁵ In this period of political flux many states were ruled by non-Congress parties, and indeed coalition governments. In such a situation, political skills and appropriate incentives were critical, as the implementing states were unlikely to accept a hierarchically imposed agenda from the Centre.

3.2 From Public Problem to Political Agenda: The Centre sets out the Policy Context⁵⁶

Recognition of these problems by itself did not lead to the adoption of new policies. Nor was the adoption of reform an uncontested, apolitical process. The central government played the role of being the reform leader—setting out the policy priorities for school reform. These included reprioritising its own expenditure on education by reallocating funds across sub-sectors, mobilising additional resources, managing contending ideas and actors, and finally, setting out the federal “rules of the game”. In the paragraphs below, I detail this role of the Centre as the reform leader on each of these accounts.

Reorganising Priorities: Increasing the Importance of Elementary Education

Prior to the launch of school reform programmes in 1993–94, the Centre was a relatively small player in the educational sector as a whole. In 1990–91 (and until 1994–95), only 12 per cent of the total education expenditure in the country was borne by the Centre, while the remaining 88 per cent was borne by the states.⁵⁷ Education was accorded a lower priority in overall budgetary expenditure, as the Centre spent only 3 per cent on education, compared to 23–24 per cent being spent by the states. Notwithstanding the small amount of resources, the Centre remained a significant actor in terms of setting policy priorities. This

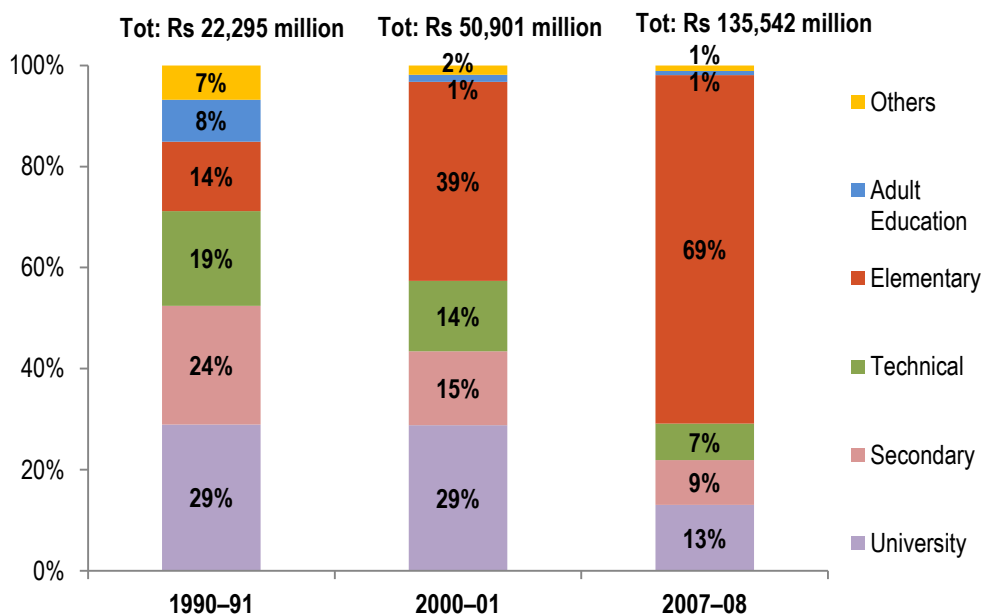
⁵⁵ At the time of implementing economic and educational reforms, the Congress Party’s Narasimha Rao led a minority government at the Centre.

⁵⁶ This title is an adaptation of Grindle (2004 p. 27)

⁵⁷ This expenditure reflects the division of responsibilities laid down by the Constitution of India, which specifies that education is an item on the “Concurrent List” (that is, List III), stated in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. A domain of joint action, by convention the Centre is involved in policy aspects and the states in matters of implementation.

could be seen in the composition of its expenditure in terms of “Plan” and “non-Plan” heads.⁵⁸ In 1990–91, nearly 55 per cent of the central expenditure was incurred under the Plan head, funding expansion and new infrastructure, whereas the states spent only 11 per cent of their resources under the Plan head, and the remaining 89 per cent under the non-Plan head, funding mainly salaries for teachers and employees of the government’s Department of Education. In terms of sub-sectors, school education was not a priority for the Centre, as it directed the major proportion of its resources towards university and secondary education, followed by technical education (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: Percentage Distribution of Real Education Expenditure of the Centre across Sub-Sectors and Totals (at 1993–94 prices)

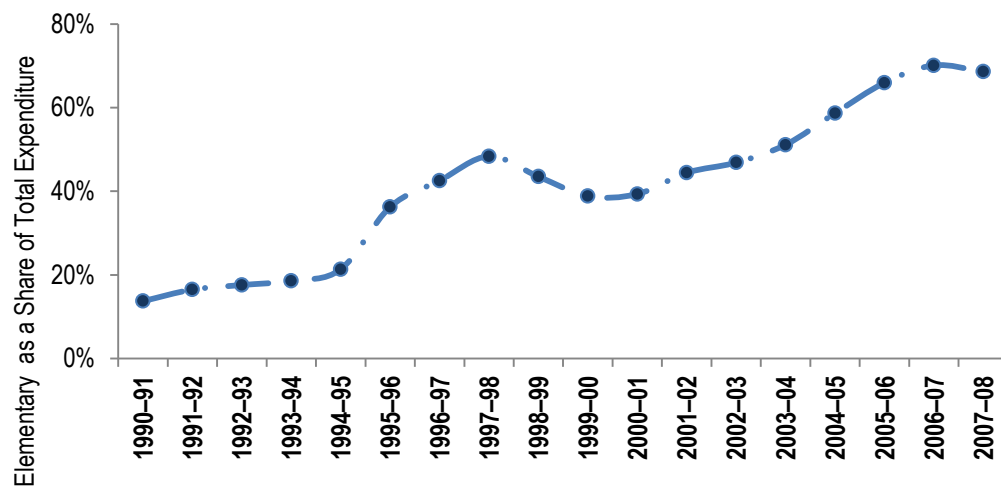


Sources: (i) Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD), Government of India (GoI), Various Years. (ii) WPI Index provided by Office of the Economic Adviser to the Government of India (GoI), Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Available at: <http://eaindustry.nic.in>

⁵⁸ Plan expenditure in the education sector is expected to provide an increase in or development of new facilities and infrastructure, or new initiatives for improving system effectiveness. I have defined the difference between Plan and non-Plan expenditure in the Research Methods Appendix, section 1B. Mooij and Dev (2004 p. 110) provide details of how the Five-Year and annual plan outlays are arrived at through negotiations between the state governments and the Centre’s Planning Commission and Ministry of Finance. Bashir (2000 pp. 7–8) explains the characteristics and purposes of Plan expenditure in the education sector.

An increasing emphasis on school education was evident as early as 1994–95, and by 1995–96 elementary education had become the Centre’s top spending priority—with 36 per cent of the education expenditure being incurred on this sub-sector. The priority for school education in the central government’s approach to education increased over the years, and continues until the present. In more recent years (2005–06 to 2007–08) this sub-sector accounted for over 60 per cent of the total education spending by the Centre (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Percentage Share of Elementary Education in Total Education Expenditure of the Centre, 1990–91 to 2007–08

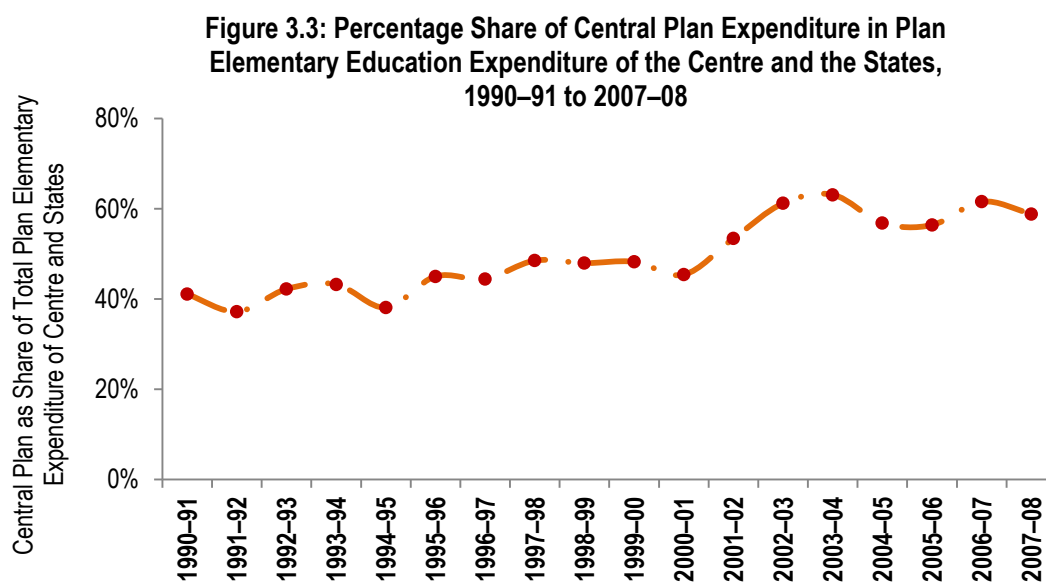


Source: Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD), Government of India (GoI), Various Years.

Until 1997–98, an increase in resources for elementary education was achieved mainly by reducing the expenditure on university education. However, there was a definite and steady increase in the total resources spent on education after that. In real terms, compared to 1990–91, the Centre’s total education budget had increased 2.28 times by 2000–01. And by 2007–08, the relative increase was nearly 6 times (see Figure 3.1). Thus, the twin elements of the Centre’s reform strategy in terms of allocating resources were

increasing the priority for, and the volume of, its expenditure on elementary education (Figure 3.1 shows the increase in volume in real term).⁵⁹

What is more, the growth in the Centre’s expenditure on elementary education consisted almost entirely of expenditure on new activities and programmes included in the country’s “Five-Year Plans” (and hence termed “Plan expenditure”). Expenditure on on-going activities was classified as “non-Plan” and comprised mainly of salaries and other recurrent expenditures. Hence, the Centre’s resources were being directed towards new initiatives and towards the development of infrastructure in the states; at the same time the state governments themselves were lacking in resources to undertake these activities on their own. Figure 3.3 shows that of the combined Plan expenditure incurred by the Centre and the states, the Centre accounted for nearly 60 per cent in 2007–08, an increase of nearly 20 points compared to 1990–91.



Source: Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD), Government of India (GoI), Various Years.

However, an increase in spending by itself need not imply significant policy changes. Thus, based on a review of quantitative research and case studies, Nelson (2007) observes that social sector spending increased in democracies, but this did not necessarily

⁵⁹ The compound annualised growth rate for elementary education expenditure by the Centre was 22.9 per cent between 1990–91 and 1999–2000 and 24.5 per cent between 2000–01 and 2007–08. In the same periods, the growth rates for total education expenditure were 9.5 per cent and 15 per cent respectively.

involve reform or improved outcomes. Nelson notes that “[b]etter outcomes also require reallocating resources and institutional reforms—changes in the sector organization, administration, and incentive systems” (Nelson 2007 p. 80). In the present context, these were achieved mainly through the Centre’s mobilisation of appropriate ideas for change and modifications in the rules for the transfer of federal resources. A key element in this process, discussed in the next section, was the utilisation of external aid for school education.

External Aid for School Education

Prior to the 1990s, resort to external assistance—in the form of aid or loans—had not been part of India’s schooling system. Thus, Ayyar (2008) notes that from 1947 until 1983 external aid agencies were reluctant to provide substantial resources for this purpose, while India too was reluctant to avail itself of external resources for primary education.⁶⁰ The main reason was that in the 1960s and 1970s, primary education was given far less emphasis than higher education, both in the country’s national plans and in the documents of external aid agencies. In short, higher education was viewed as a central means for producing the skilled manpower that was required for economic growth. This situation changed during the 1980s when there was growing evidence that investment in primary education was critical for efforts to reduce poverty. Thus as Colclough and De (2010) note, this led to both increased allocations for primary education and changes in aid policy. The turning point in the education sector came after the 1990 Jomtien Conference, and the economic crisis faced by the country in 1991.

At the 1990 World Conference on Education held at Jomtien in Thailand, there was a coordinated effort among donors to increase funding for primary education, and there was pressure on the Indian government to accept external aid. At Jomtien, the World Bank

⁶⁰Ayyar (2008 p. 22) notes the existence of small bilateral assistance for four state-specific projects between 1983–90. But these projects were limited in their geographical coverage and programme content. These projects were the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project with assistance from the Overseas Development Administration of the UK, the *Shiksha Karmi* Project with funding from the Swedish International Development Agency, the *Mahila Samakhya* which involved Dutch assistance, and Non-Formal Education with assistance from NORAD. Large volumes of external aid became available only after 1993, following the government’s decision to avail of assistance from the International Development Association, an arm of the World Bank.

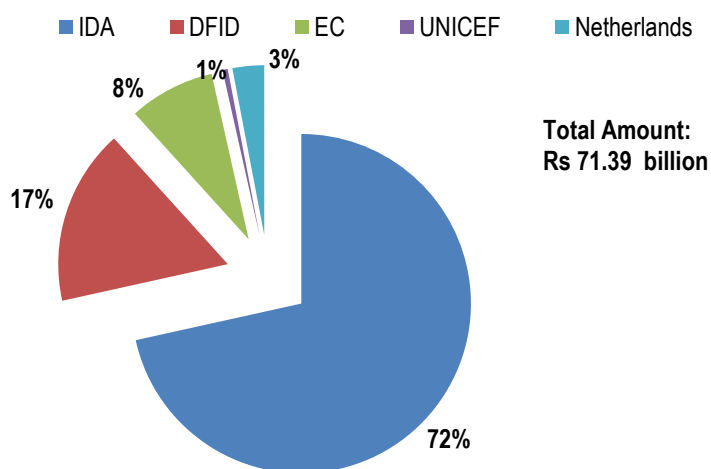
played a lead role in taking forward the “Education For All” (EFA)⁶¹ agenda, and the Bank was very keen to include primary education in its lending portfolio for India. There was some history to this issue—with successive World Bank country directors urging the government to borrow, and India refusing to do so.⁶² The country’s refusal to borrow was noted as enhancing the bargaining power of the government vis-à-vis the World Bank (Ayyar 2008). The proposed credit actually materialised after the 1991 balance of payments crisis. This forced India to resort to a loan from the World Bank, while at the same time introducing fiscal reforms aimed at reducing government expenditure.⁶³ Following this development, a Social Safety Net Adjustment Credit was offered to India in 1992, with the aim of protecting expenditure on the social sector. This was followed by a World Bank credit for a basic education project in Uttar Pradesh. Thereafter, India continued to accept external aid for its primary/elementary education programmes—including for the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) that was launched in 1993 and the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) that was introduced in 2001. The World Bank became the largest donor for primary education in the country. This is exemplified in Figure 3.4 which shows the share of various donor agencies in resources for the DPEP from 1993 until 2002.

⁶¹ A global movement for universalising primary education, led by UNESCO, the EFA was launched in 1990 at the Jomtien Conference. The movement consists of representatives of national governments, civil society groups, and international organisations.

⁶² See Jones (1996) for further details.

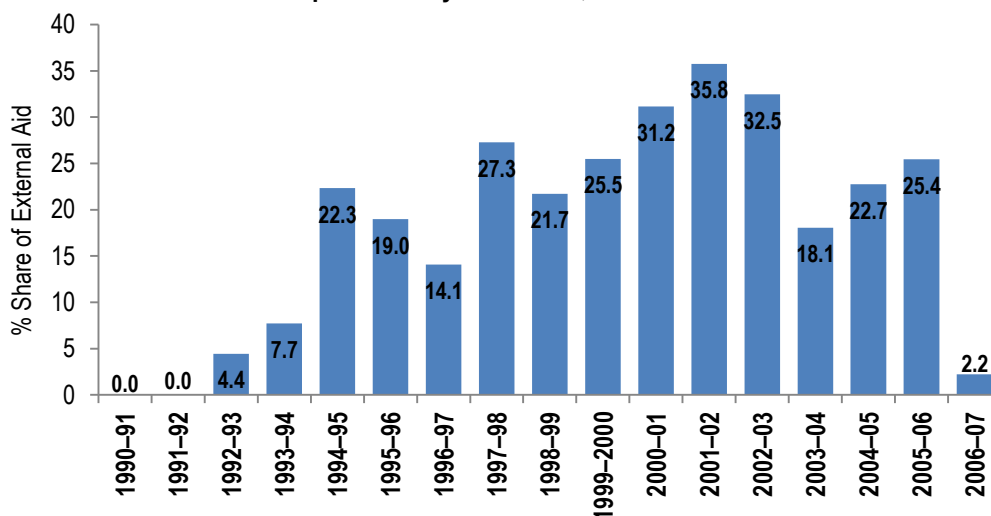
⁶³ Since 1985 India had been having problems with its balance of payments. Things reached the proportion of a ‘crisis’ by mid-1991, when foreign exchange reserves were barely enough to fund imports estimated for barely three weeks. The caretaker government of Chandra Shekhar had to pledge gold and borrow from the IMF.

Figure 3.4: Contribution of External Agencies to Resources for District Primary Education Programme, 1993–2002



Source: Progress Overview Report, 16th Joint Review Mission, District Primary Education Programme, Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development (MoHRD), Government of India.

Figure 3.5: Share (%) of External Aid in Elementary Education Expenditure by the Centre, 1990–91 to 2006–07



Source: Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD), Government of India (GoI), Various Years.

Note: External aid on SSA data is available from 2004-05. In the earlier years, SSA was a domestically funded programme.

In volume terms, the share of external aid in the Centre's expenditure on elementary education was not very large—it reached its peak of nearly 35 per cent in

2001–02, and showed a decline thereafter (see Figure 3.5). With external resources for SSA-II coming in, the share was expected to increase again to about 17.5 per cent in the three-year period 2008–09 to 2010–11 (Ayyar 2008 p. 22), but it was not expected to exceed the level of 2001–02. The real significance of external resources was not their size, but rather their ability to enhance the investment finances for primary education and allow the Centre to introduce changes to the norms for federal resource transfers to the states—making the process more flexible, while demanding greater accountability. As a result, there was some resolution of the principal-agent problem in federal relations, giving the Centre some powers of monitoring, while allowing the states greater flexibility of resource use.

Managing Contending Ideas, Interests, and Institutions

The evolution of an agenda and a technical design for reform was a contested political process. It was not merely a question of finding a technocratic solution to problems. This was evident from the role played by the DoE at the Centre in managing contending ideas about the vision and scope of reform, and the institutions that would play a part in the process. The main contending ideas were whether reforms should focus on primary education alone, or on a broader agenda of basic education which included both non-formal and adult education. At the time of the Jomtien Conference, the country had a successful programme on adult literacy, inspired by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The parties of the left, especially the CPI-M which had a strong political base in Kerala and West Bengal, backed this programme, and a large number of intellectuals and academics also supported it.⁶⁴ The programme involved mobilising volunteers and holding learning camps for adults, and it was run outside of formal educational institutions.

The position of the World Bank stood in contrast to this approach. The Bank put exclusive emphasis on the provision of formal primary schooling. This view was shared by various aid agencies, and even UNICEF supported the Bank's position. These two organisations—the World Bank and UNICEF—were the principal sponsors of the Jomtien Conference, where they made public their sole focus on funding for primary education

⁶⁴ Thus Kerala's Ernakulum district was widely noted for the success of its "Total Literacy Campaign".

(King 2007). However, both the UNESCO and India's then secretary for education, Anil Bordia, felt that primary education alone was not enough for universal literacy. They stressed the importance of adult literacy and non-formal education, and Bordia's stand was backed by the adult literacy and non-formal education programmes that were then operational.

The sharp turn in India's national policy, in favour of the agenda of primary schooling, was affected by the economic crisis of 1991, and the need for World Bank resources. This was reflected in the declining importance of adult education in the Centre's education spending priorities—from 8 per cent in 1990–91 to 1 per cent in 1995–96—and the rise in spending on elementary education from 14 to 39 per cent over the same period (see Figure 3.1). Notwithstanding this sharp turn, the emphasis on non-formal education and mobilisation of volunteer-effort based approaches in basic education (favoured by the supporters of a more inclusive agenda) persisted in practice.⁶⁵ As the reforms moved to their implementation phase, many states (for example, MP and Rajasthan) adopted them alongside a more formal, institutional agenda for primary schooling.

The bearers of these contending ideas were mainly the World Bank and the government's DoE. The differences between the two were observed at the Jomtien Conference. Thus Jones (1996 p. 222) notes that the Bank faced an influential and highly articulate opponent in Anil Bordia. In voicing his critique of the Bank's policies, Bordia argued on behalf of many less articulate borrowers who were in disagreement with the Bank's approach of promoting primary education policies exclusively within a context of structural adjustment. These differences meant that the Indian government, when it did reverse its policy, was careful about the process. In particular, the government did not accept the Bank's "conditionalities". Instead, the planning process was the government's own, and a grant from the European Commission for the same programme turned it into a multi-donor policy reform (rather than an exclusive one with the Bank). This strategy

⁶⁵ Some of the programmes initiated with bilateral external assistance prior to World Bank funding for primary education, were akin to "laboratories" where mobilisation-based models were designed and implemented. For example, SIDA assisted the *Shiksha Karmi* and *Lok Jumbish* programmes in Rajasthan (see Clarke and Jha 2006, for details of these two programmes).

worked well in enhancing the political acceptability of the programme in the states, many of which had powerful teacher unions with left-leaning ideologies.

The other contesting actors were the two central ministries for education and for economic affairs, the DoE and the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) in Delhi. Conventionally, it was the DEA which dealt with external agencies, and the DoE had little role to play vis-à-vis them. The DoE also had no influence over line ministries for education in the states, as these were under the control of the respective state governments. But this constrained role of the DoE changed during the course of negotiations for the funding of the DPEP in 1993–94. Now, the role of the DoE was greatly enhanced both horizontally in its dealings with the DEA, and vertically when dealing with state governments. The DoE mediated with the external agencies in a manner in which resources came in on the basis of programme parameters which were designed domestically. External control over school policies was likely to have generated widespread negative reactions (especially among the left-leaning parties) and made the task of achieving political acceptability for externally financed reform efforts a difficult one.

As far as the relationship with the states was concerned, the externally assisted programmes gave the DoE a direct monitoring role through scrutiny of the annual work plans of states (prepared for the DPEP) and a six-monthly Joint Review Mission to the states.⁶⁶ The flow of external resources also reduced the exclusive reliance of state governments on the Planning Commission for funds. This latter process was negotiated on an annual basis (between state governments, the Ministry of Finance, and the Planning Commission), and it obstructed long-term planning by the states themselves.⁶⁷ The DoE also negotiated with the DEA to pass on external resources to state governments as grants—reversing the existing procedure whereby external aid was transmitted to state governments as 70 per cent loan and 30 per cent grant. Most of these procedures were

⁶⁶ The DPEP initiated the first ever joint review of state education programmes. The review team was set up by the DoE's bureau for elementary education, and it consisted of representatives from all donor agencies and the Government of India. This arrangement continued under the SSA, and donor agencies were not allowed any other independent review of how the programme was run in the states. This mechanism mitigated donor control on the reform agenda, while it simultaneously permitted the Centre to gain a voice on how things were run in the states.

⁶⁷ Bagchi (2001 p. 6) notes that this process worked well until the Congress Party ruled in both, the Centre, as well as in the states. However, when non-Congress parties came to power in the states, there was resistance to this form of domination by the Centre.

accepted and further enhanced by the SSA in 2000–01, especially when external aid was accepted for this programme as well as after negotiations in 2003–04. Enhanced resources for investment in school education on easy terms provided an opportunity for the states as they now had a chance to design some aspects of how they were to proceed with the reforms.

3.3 Designing Federal Guidelines for Reform

In this section I argue that the central policies that stimulated change in the states, characterised as educational reform, can be classified into three phases on the basis of differences in policy characteristics. In the first phase, 1986–93, the policies were more domestic in their origin and resource support. These new policies were based on a thorough critique of the existing system of education, which despite its many achievements, had serious shortcomings in terms of poor coverage, gender and social-caste disparities, and also a serious paucity of resources (Government of India 1985 pp. 15–27).⁶⁸ The magnitude of the problem could be assessed from the government’s own admission, that after spending over 90 per cent of the available resources on teacher salaries and administration, “practically nothing is available to buy blackboard and chalks, let alone charts, inexpensive teaching aids, or even pitchers for drinking water” (GoI 1985 pp. 37). Following these observations, specific interventions were made in the form of “Centrally Sponsored Schemes”—in particular, Operation Blackboard (OB), Teacher Education (TE), and Non-Formal Education (NFE). The most important of these was the OB, which was meant to provide minimum levels of physical infrastructure, teachers, and learning materials to primary schools. In 1990–91, the OB programme accounted for nearly 66 per cent of federal expenditure on elementary education. Its significance began to decline following the introduction of the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) programme in 1995–96. Educationally backward states preferred the NFE programme because it left them with few or no recurrent liabilities (Bashir 2000; Bashir and Ayyar 2001).

⁶⁸ The government published a thorough critique of the existing scenario in education in August 1985, in a report entitled “The Challenge of Education: A Policy perspective”. The NPE 1986, and the Programme of Action (PoA), 1992, followed. These three documents together form the policy statement for beginning the phase of reorientation of policies for elementary school education, which I have classified here as “Phase I” of the policy reform process.

The Centre's greater engagement with reforming the school sector began with these schemes. As specific purpose grants, they were intended to level out educational disparities, but they did not achieve this. Thus, more developed states were better able to utilise the funds for the OB and TE programmes, and they progressed with building their school education infrastructure. In contrast, the preference for non-formal education among the educationally backwards states meant that federal resources were not employed in expanding school infrastructure in these states. As specific purpose federal grants, they were somewhat restricted in their scope, and did not offer a complete vision for change. These programmes continued even after policies more characteristic of what I classify as the second phase of reforms came into operation. Many of the local outcomes of these Centrally Sponsored Schemes (or their absence) were evident on the ground, especially when I surveyed the schools. They form part of my observations in Chapter 7.

In what I consider as the second phase—1993 until the present—policies were still designed domestically, but in terms of their vision they came closer to the ideas of the Jomtien Conference and “Education For All”. The specific interventions in this second stage were made through the DPEP, and they were expanded under the SSA. In this second phase, policies moved closer to a global understanding of educational reform, and external aid became an important feature. As compared to the rather prescriptive approach of the first phase, a “guideline” approach now characterised the two main programmes—the DPEP and SSA. The Centre provided indicative parameters of permissible activities, and left states free to implement the schemes once their work plans had been assessed. An additional attraction for states was the “society” set up at the state level to receive funds under both the DPEP and SSA.⁶⁹ These funds were no longer required to be routed through state treasuries (known for their inflexible procedures), nor did states have to undertake annual negotiations with the Planning Commission. The associated financial norms prescribed a ceiling of 24 per cent on construction activities and 6 per cent on administrative costs—two areas well known as rife with opportunities for pilferage and

⁶⁹ These societies were special purpose vehicles, set up under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. Headed by a government officer, usually from the Indian Administrative Service, the society was free to hire government and non-government persons on flexible terms.

patronage. This also meant that the states were forced to undertake activities which were meant to improve the quality of education.

The innovative guidelines of the Centre and the innovations made by the states endured the test of time, and they continued as features of programme design even as a new and expanded intervention by the Centre was put in place through the SSA. This programme covered all districts of the country. Moreover, it included the entire elementary cycle of schooling, and not just the primary grades. Two of the earlier Centrally Sponsored Schemes—the OB and NFE—were subsumed under the SSA, and it became the only programme for elementary education that donor agencies could support. The relationship with external agencies was further negotiated. And unlike in DPEP, external resources from a particular agency could no longer be ear-marked for any particular state—they went to a common pool of resources meant for the country as a whole.

A third concurrent phase saw the emergence of more “rights-based approaches” to the provision of elementary education and educational incentives. These were seen as a universal right, the denial of which allowed the aggrieved party to approach courts for redress. The MDM programme and the Right to Education Act (2009) were specific interventions of this phase. The associated resources were mobilised domestically, there was greater vigilance by civil society, and there was also more judicial activism.

In Table 3.2 I summarise each of these phases in terms of the substance of the reform proposals, and the opportunities and incentives for both the Centre and the states.

Table 3.2: Three Stages of Educational Reform in India, 1987–2009

Context and Main Features	Programme Initiatives	Type/Substance of Reform	Incentives for Centre and States
First Stage, 1987 to 2001–02			
<p>Context: Initiated after the National Policy on Education, 1986</p> <p>Main Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Domestic funding – Implemented through traditional institutional structures – Line departments of education in the states – Keeps the formal and non-formal primary education system on two different tracks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Operation Blackboard – Teacher Education – Non-Formal Education 	<p>Type: Access reforms</p> <p>Substance: Improving the physical quality of formal schools, hiring additional teachers, school supplies, and setting up district-based teacher education institutes</p>	<p>Centre: Provides resources, but has no powers of monitoring</p> <p>States:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No flexibility in design – States find recurrent liabilities burdensome – Educationally backward states opt for non-formal education which works through volunteers and imposes no additional financial burden
Second Stage, 1993 until the present			
<p>Context: Initiated after the economic crisis of 1991</p> <p>Main Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – External aid for DPEP and external aid and domestic resources for SSA – Implemented through new agencies called “societies” set up in the states – Started with a few districts in selected states under DPEP-I, nationwide coverage under SSA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) – Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) 	<p>Type: Improving access and quality</p> <p>Substance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Development of a perspective plan for institutional reforms in primary education under DPEP; extended to elementary education under SSA – Focus on gender and social caste based inequities in the planning process – Agenda includes traditional issues like increasing access by construction of classrooms and schools, hiring teachers, and also new issues like teacher training and textbook revision – Direct grants to schools, teachers, and village education committees (VECs) – New local institutions at the sub-district and school cluster level 	<p>Centre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provides resources and negotiates with external agencies – Power of monitoring through joint reviews and control of state societies <p>States:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – External funds given as grant support – Allowed to innovate on design – Recurrent liabilities under SSA to be funded by states on a gradual basis (central support available on a declining basis)

Table 3.2 (continued): Three Stages of Educational Reform in India, 1987–2009			
Context and Main Features	Programme Initiatives	Type/Substance of Reform	Incentives for Centre and States
Third Stage, 1995 until the present			
<p>Context: Initiated after judicial intervention</p> <p>Main Features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Rights-based approach – Universal entitlement to all children – Involvement of civil society groups in design and implementation – Domestic resources – Monitoring by federal courts – Statutory authorisation through a constitutional amendment – Fundamental right of all children in the age group 6–14 years – Monitoring by new institutions—state and national level commissions established for the protection of child rights 	<p>Mid-Day Meal programme introduced in 1995; most states provided dry rations under the scheme</p> <p>2001: Supreme Court intervention in Right to Food case led to cooked meals being provided to all children attending primary schools</p> <p>Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009</p>	<p>Type: Non-educational incentives to increase school attendance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cooked meals for all students, from classes I-V – Grain, transportation cost, and conversion cost provided by the Centre – Guidelines on physical infrastructure formulated by the Centre and resources provided – Duty of the states to provide free schooling, textbooks, and uniforms – Normative standard set for school quality, teachers, and the student-teacher ratio – School meals to be provided – School management committees to be set up 	<p>Centre: Strong political incentive, as it would be seen as directly providing food to the poor</p> <p>States:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Initially not enthusiastic. Forced by the courts to set up infrastructure and provide cooked meals, even in states with very poor infrastructure – Weak political incentives for states, but once forced by the court states could not afford to be seen as delaying on providing food to the poor – High political cost of non-provision – Legal right, so aggrieved citizens can approach the courts – Increased vigilance by civil society – States have to implement this statutorily

3.4 Adoption of Change in the States

The implementation of these new policies was characterised by differences in approach and strategy and by varying performance across the states. Between 1991 and 2001, there was a definite improvement in literacy rates for the country as a whole—an increase of 13 percentage points. All states except for educationally advanced Kerala and Gujarat, and educationally backward Bihar, saw an increase of more than 10 percentage points in their literacy rates over this decade. Among the educationally backward states, MP and Orissa had notable performances, showing increases of 20 and 25 points respectively. AP and Uttar Pradesh followed with increases of 17 and 16 points. Bihar trailed behind with the lowest literacy of all—47 per cent (see Table 3.3).

In primary school participation rates too there was significant improvement in all the educationally backward states, with the exception of Bihar. Thus between 1993–94 and 1999–2000 the NSS reported an increase greater than 10 percentage points in AP, MP, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. However, in Bihar there was a slight decline of 2.2 points in primary school participation rates. It was notable too that AP, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan also significantly reduced the gender gap in primary school participation (see Table 3.3).

Once again, variation in per-pupil expenditure, especially among the educationally backward states, gave some indication of the diversity of approaches that the states adopted in implementing reform policies. Between 1990–91 and 1999–2000, all the six educationally backward states experienced an increase in per student expenditure and nominal expenditure on elementary education (see Tables 3.1 and 3.3). After that, however, only in AP, Orissa, and Rajasthan, has there been some increase. Further, in Bihar, MP, and Uttar Pradesh, there has been a decline in per-pupil real expenditure in nominal terms, as these states have major changes in their teacher policies. Para-teachers (on contract, and at lower salaries than regular teachers), have been hired in these states on a large scale, leading to reduced expenditure on a per-student basis.⁷⁰

Interestingly, the southern states of Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu have not made use of para-teachers. And in AP, para-teachers have been used on a temporary basis to cater for increases in enrolment, or until regular teacher recruitment could be made. These and other differences in terms of the emphasis on expansion of the formal school system (in Karnataka and AP), in contrast to an emphasis on alternate, non-formal arrangements like the Education Guarantee Scheme in Madhya Pradesh, are indicative of the widely divergent state-level strategies adopted towards schools. Educational reform initiated under the DPEP, and following it the SSA, was clearly providing the states with the opportunity to adapt this programme on considerations that were internal to the context of each state. The reasons for variation, therefore, have to be seen in the policy and political conditions prevalent in each state, and in the manner in which the elected and non-elected leaders were steering the reform process within this context.

⁷⁰ However, when I analysed the data on per-pupil nominal expenditure for every year between 1990–91 and 2007–08, I found great fluctuations. It is only in the long-run that a trend of steady increase can be seen.

Table 3.3: Educational Achievement and Deficits in 15 Major States, 1999–2000

State	Literacy Rate*	Gross Enrolment Rate	School Participation (6–10 years)			Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR)	Public Expenditure on Elementary Education	
	Total	Total	Male	Female	Total	Total	As % of GSDP	Per-Pupil Expenditure Rs (Nominal Values)
Educationally Backward States								
Andhra Pradesh	60.5	103.3	87.3	81.7	84.6	47	1	1,376
Bihar	47.0	78.6	58.8	44.8	52.5	63	6.4	2,223
Madhya Pradesh	63.7	115	76.4	66	71.5	44	2.3	1,232
Orissa	63.1	108.8	80	69.8	75	37	3	2,072
Rajasthan	60.4	111.9	84.1	64.3	74.8	54	2.2	1,762
Uttar Pradesh	56.3	65	79.1	66.5	73.4	42	1.6	1,620
Other States								
Assam	63.3	114.9	82.3	77.5	80	38	3.4	2,108
Gujarat	69.1	113.4	87.9	79.8	84.2	51	1.5	2,034
Haryana	67.9	82	88.9	80.9	85.2	43	1.1	2,445
Karnataka	66.6	109.4	83.5	82.4	82.9	32	1.5	1,645
Kerala	90.9	85.3	96	94.1	95	45	2	3,218
Maharashtra	76.9	114.1	92.9	89.3	91.1	35	0.9	1,754
Punjab	69.7	80.8	90.8	88.3	89.6	41	0.8	2,402
Tamil Nadu	73.5	100.7	94.3	92.2	93.3	36	1.6	2,931
West Bengal	68.6	100.2	81.3	72.6	77.2	54	1.1	1,495
All India	64.8	94.9	81.2	72.7	77.2	43		

Sources: Literacy Rate: "Census of India", 2001; Gross Enrolment Rate from "Select Educational Statistics", MoHRD, Gol 1999–2000; School Participation Rates are calculated from the National Sample Survey, 1999–2000; Pupil-Teacher Ratio is calculated from "Select Educational Statistics", MoHRD 1999–2000; Public expenditure on elementary education is calculated from the "Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure in Education", MoHRD, Gol.

Notes: 1. Literacy Rate: "Census of India", 2001; Gross Enrolment Rate from "Select Educational Statistics", MoHRD, Gol 1999–2000; School Participation Rates are calculated from the National Sample Survey, 1999–2000; Pupil-Teacher Ratio is calculated from "Select Educational Statistics", MoHRD 1999–2000; Public expenditure on elementary education is calculated from the "Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure in Education", MoHRD, Gol.

Definitions: 1. Literacy rate is defined for population above 6 years of age; 2. Gross enrolment rate is defined as the ratio of total enrolment in grades I-V to the child population aged 6–10 years expressed in percentage terms. 3. School participation rate is defined as percentage of children aged 6–10 years attending any type of educational institution; 4. Nominal expenditure on elementary education per student is expressed in rupees at current prices, revenue account.

3. 5 Conclusion: The Political Dynamics of Agenda Setting

The role of the Centre's DoE in managing contesting ideas, actors, and institutions highlights the fact that agenda-setting is a political process, and not an activity concerned exclusively with technical design. The actions of the DoE were of significance in terms of how the reforms were introduced and how the process was managed without engendering political resistance. The political dynamics differed at each stage of the policy reform process. At a relatively early stage, the two critical issues were: (i) managing the dynamics between the country and the external aid agencies that were involved in education, and (ii) ensuring the smooth adoption of a central programme within the country's federal system.

In fact, the federal distribution of power in India's competitive political situation turned out to be an "institutional factor" which worked in favour of the adoption of reforms. This conclusion is opposed to that suggested by political economy arguments to the effect that existing institutional arrangements are likely to constrain policy reforms. Instead, states found opportunities in the room for manoeuvre that they got with a new type of central programme, together with the greater availability of resources on easy terms. States could innovate and contest vested interests around school education, but beyond that, political actors in the states could be seen by their electorates as having done something for their schools, despite the various constraints. The different approaches to implementation in the states gave the reforms a "local" hue, and consequently there was no "national" resistance to the educational reform agenda.⁷¹ Hence, federal actions at this time displayed both the use of political skill and the creation of appropriate political incentives.

The analysis of the contested process of agenda-setting also throws doubt on some of the general assumptions about the political economy of the policy reform process. Among these assumptions are: (i) that policy-reform emerges only at a time of crisis, and (ii) that interests and institutions constrain reforms. In the Indian case, the economic crisis of 1991 did indeed play an important role so far as the timing of the reforms was concerned. But more important was the subsequent management of the process of introducing reforms by the DoE, and how it anticipated possible sources of resistance and

⁷¹ I owe this insight to Jenkins (1999) who argues that economic reform in India did not face the resistance expected in theory because the federal distribution of power "quarantined" opposition within individual states.

features that would enhance the chances of reforms being adopted by the states. These features also differentiated educational policy reform from economic policy reform—the latter was more like a “stroke of the pen” decision. The educational policy reform was characterised more by protracted negotiations and deliberate changes to many institutional arrangements—concerns that were not prominent on the agenda of reformers of economic policy. In hindsight, the educational reform agenda was far more vigilant about the need for political acceptance of the reform both across party lines and across interests with different political ideologies.⁷²

The political dynamics were characterised more by these strategic choices than the influence of interests or institutions in resisting reforms. At this stage, non-elected policymakers played a role that was larger than that played by political actors in managing ideas and actors, and designing federal guidelines. Hence, one conclusion about the theory of interests and institutions acting as political constraints to change is that their role differs at different stages in the overall process. Each stage constitutes a distinct arena for contest, and also offers distinct opportunities.

But the politics of agenda-setting is an incomplete portrayal of the political dynamics of the reform process. It does not address implementation, and specifically the political actions of managing conflict and creating new stakeholders through incentives and alliances that are witnessed during this phase. It was during this implementation phase that states carved out their own scripts for reform and opened up new arenas for contest.

The following chapters focus on the implementation of educational reform and the differences in performance of the educationally backward states. These chapters address the question of why states performed differently, and why policy and political leaders adopted different approaches, given considerable similarity of context in terms of federal policy and resources.

⁷² For example, West Bengal that was ruled by the CPI-M led Left Front, did not accept World Bank funded DPEP in the early days. The Centre mobilised DFID grant support at a later stage. The sensitivity of the CPI-(M) towards the Bank was an “unspoken” boundary line that the Centre never crossed.

Chapter 4

Federal Opportunities, State-level Implementation: The Puzzle of Contrasting Outcomes in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar

In this chapter, I focus more directly on the “units” of study that I have selected—that is, the states of Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Bihar. The basic issues I address relate to the context in which educational reform was implemented in these states. I also assess the progress made in over a decade of implementation of these policies. Apart from the federal support in terms of the resource and policy templates for reforms available to both the states, the similarity in social and political context, reform histories, and the presence of political leaders who appeared inclined towards taking on the challenge of policy innovation, generated similar expectations of successful results in both the states. However, variations in performance pose a puzzle for understanding the policy process. That Bihar did not do as well as AP, is indicative that policy outcomes are not a mechanical consequence of technical inputs in a system leading to change—the process of change matters.

The arguments in this chapter are organised in four sections. On the basis of research and policy literature, I first compare some of the similarities of context within which educational reform was implemented in the two states. I then examine the problems and constraints that these reforms were meant to address, specifically the challenges faced by their school systems at the beginning of the 1990s. In the third section, I suggest five propositions—drawn from political circumstances and prior efforts of reforming school education in each state, which form the basis for expectations about optimistic results from reform implementation in both the states. In the fourth, I provide some indicators of outcomes—what happened as a result of the reforms on the basis of data from household surveys on school participation (namely the National Sample Survey). In concluding, I argue in favour of the need for looking at the key intervening “variable”—the dynamic

process of reform implementation, which must be analysed to unravel the puzzle of why states in the Indian federal system use similar opportunities in different ways, and ultimately perform differently.

4.1 The Context of Reform Implementation in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar

Comparison of States in the Policy Reform Process

In the research on the policy-reform process in India, comparisons of variations in the performance of Indian states, located within a common, federal policy framework, has been of late, quite common. Some examples are Bêteille (2009), Jenkins (2004), Sharma and Ramachandran (2009), Sinha (2003), and Sipahimalani-Rao (2004). Of these, I see Jenkins (2004) as one of the best examples of analytical reflections on the policy-reform process on the basis of two-state comparisons. He argues that India's federal system with its common policy and institutional framework is like a "boon to students of comparative politics who seek to understand and explain the divergent patterns and outcomes that the practice of democracy can produce". Even cross-national comparisons of democracy do not provide a similar opportunity for analysis (as Indian states do), as they are unable to control for institutional and policy characteristics (Jenkins 2004 pp.3–4). Sinha (2003) considers it important to examine what she calls the "sub-national developmental pathways within India", in order to understand why given the common "constraints" of central regulatory policy, states have varied in their economic performance (Sinha 2003 p.460).

Comparative analyses of the politics of social-sector reforms have not been attempted as yet, although variations in state performances are increasingly being noted. In the area of education policy reform, some scholars who have compared the variation in performance of states in the northern and southern parts of the country include Sharma and Ramachandran (2009) and Sipahimalani-Rao (2004). Besides outcomes, the differences in the approach and strategy adopted by different Indian states is also commonly mentioned—for example, Mehendale (2010 pp.11–12) notes the diversity in state strategies with respect to teachers, school management committees, and recognition of schools noticed at the time of formulating the model rules for the Right To Education Act,

2009 for the country as a whole. Yet, comparative analyses of why these variations exist at the state level are few. Given this paucity of research, comparative analyses of the politics of social-sector reform process, have to of necessity move forward with the analytical frameworks developed for examining the politics of economic reforms.

The motivation for the comparison I undertake is similar to that of Sinha's (2003). I too examine the question of variations in sub-national performance in my research, given similar opportunities by the Centre. Sinha argues that the significance of variations in the performance of states within India's federal framework had hitherto been considered marginal to the analysis on India's development trajectory. She sees this variation as a "joint product of central rules, provincial strategic choices, and sub-national institutional variation" (Sinha 2003 pp. 460–61). However, there are two notable differences—first, while Sinha's focus is on economic policy reforms, I examine the area of education policy; second for Sinha, the federal policy framework was a constraining one, a *dirigiste* model of state control, whereas in my analysis, the federal policy framework has been an enabling one, promoting educational reform in the states.

Further, in choosing the units for comparison—one state from the northern part of the country and another from the southern, my approach is similar to that of Sharma and Ramachandran (2009) and Sipahimalani-Rao (2004). The southern states of India, especially Kerala and Tamil Nadu, have performed better as compared to those in the northern parts, especially the more populous north Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.⁷³ Sipahimalani-Rao (2004) selects the states of Karnataka in the south and Uttar Pradesh in the north on the basis of contrasting indicators of educational outcomes (Karnataka does much better than Uttar Pradesh), and highlights the contrasting nature of policy choices made with respect to teacher management issues in the two states. While Karnataka was able to rationalise its policies, reduce discretion, and possibilities for use of arbitrary authority, Uttar Pradesh was unable to do so. However, the author does not delve into the reasons for this variation. It is this gap that I seek to fill by understanding the

⁷³ The starting point of the debate on the great internal variations in performance of Indian states is the focus on Kerala's extraordinary achievement by Dreze and Sen (1989). The authors argue that while India as a whole fared badly in comparison to China on indicators of human development (average levels of literacy, infant mortality, and life expectancy among others), but the Indian state of Kerala did much better than China as a whole on all these indicators. The authors see Kerala's better outcomes to be the result of state "supported security" and "public action".

process of policy reforms as a political one—it is political agency which accounts for this variation. While there may be differences of context between different states (Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh in the case of Sipahimalani-Rao), these by themselves do not explain why seemingly irrational policies persist in some cases and states are unable to effect changes, whereas other states are able to do so.

Similarities of Context in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar: Political Conditions and Prior History of Educational Reform

There are many similarities of context between AP and Bihar, and I discuss these in order to provide a background to the study of educational reform in the selected states.

In terms of demographic features, both were large populous states, accounting for nearly 7.4 and 8.1 per cent of the country's population respectively in the 2001 Census. Furthermore, the contribution each made to the growth of population in the country between 1981–91 was also very similar—AP accounted for 7.9 and Bihar for 7.5 per cent of the total increase in India's population in this period. However, their paths were divergent thereafter, and this was especially reflected in the decline of the child population in AP. In the 1990s, the state registered a sharp decline of nearly 10.3 per cent in its decadal growth rate of population (from 24.2 per cent in 1981–91 to 13.9 per cent in 1991–2001). This was the highest amongst all the major Indian states.

Over the same time period, Bihar stood out in contrast, with an increase of 5 per cent in its decadal growth rate of population (from 23.4 per cent in 1981–91 to 28.4 per cent in 1991–2001). This increase was also contrary to the all-India trend of a decline of nearly 2.5 per cent (from 23.8 per cent in 1981–91 to 21.3 per cent in 1991–2001), and was responsible for changing Bihar's position in the ranking of states in terms of their contribution to the national population. In 1991, Bihar was ranked fifth among the major Indian states, after Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, and AP in that order. By the 2001 Census, the increase in Bihar's population was of a magnitude where it climbed up to rank 3, pushing West Bengal and AP below it to ranks 4 and 5 respectively (National Commission on Population 2006).

The decline in child population in AP had a significant implication for planning and allocation of resources for school education. The state was likely to deal with a smaller size of school entrants making it possible to provide more for every child. In Bihar, the increasing numbers meant that infrastructure and facilities were likely to fall short of the demands on the system.

Seen in terms of its caste composition, their demography had comparable social aspects. Both states were home to a very large share of the country's Scheduled Castes (SCs)—a disadvantaged social-caste group, experiencing severe deprivation evident in their very low literacy achievements. Nearly 16 per cent of the population in each state consisted of SCs, and the states were noted among the “top-ten” in the country for their very large SC population (Government of India 2011). Further, the population of Scheduled Tribes (STs) was sizeable only in AP (nearly 6.5 per cent of the total population), but not in Bihar following its partition in 2000 when its ST population became a part of the new state of Jharkhand.⁷⁴ The other interesting dimension of the social-caste composition of their population was the presence of a sizeable Backward Caste (BC) population—estimated to be nearly 44 per cent of the total population in AP (Suri 2002 p.12) and 41 per cent in Bihar (estimated from the National Sample Survey [NSS] 55th round, 1999–2000).⁷⁵ At the bottom of the social hierarchy, the SCs and BCs together formed the majority of the population in each state.

In terms of literacy rates in 1991, while AP did better than Bihar, both the states were below the average reported for the all-India level. However, between 1991 and 2001, AP closed its gap with the national average. From being 8 percentage points below it in 1991, the state's literacy rates were only 4 percentage points below the national average in 2001. The case of Bihar was different—its literacy rates went further below the national average in 2001 as compared to 1991. Marked gender differences also characterised the literacy rates of both the states in 1991. In the case of AP, its female literacy rates were

⁷⁴ The population of scheduled tribes in Bihar is now estimated to be less than 1 per cent.

⁷⁵ Other than the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes, the decadal census in India does not officially record any other caste status, until 2011. Further, the population of backward castes in states is estimated either on the basis of the 1931 Census or from reports of Backward Classes Commission specially set up by state governments. Another basis for estimates is the NSSO household survey 1999-2000 (55th round) which has asked respondents for their caste status. The 2011 census, however, has recorded caste status, and its reports will form the first robust indicator in this regard.

nearly 22 percentage points below male literacy rates, whereas in the case of Bihar, this difference was higher, and female literacy rates in the state were nearly 29 percentage points lower than male literacy rates. Between 1991 and 2001, these gender differences declined somewhat in the case of both the states, but in absolute terms female literacy rates in Bihar still remained abysmally low (see Table 4.1). In exhibiting these literacy characteristics, AP was an outlier among all states of southern India—as all the other states had literacy rates higher than the national average, and a near parity in male-female literacy rates, while Bihar was among the worst performers among all the major states.

Table 4.1: Literacy Rates, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and all-India, 1991–2011

States/UTs	1991			2001			2011		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Andhra Pradesh	55.13	32.72	44.09	70.85	51.17	61.11	75.56	59.74	67.66
Bihar	52.49	22.89	38.48	60.32	33.57	47.53	73.39	53.33	63.82
All India	64.13	39.29	52.21	75.96	54.28	65.38	82.14	65.46	74.04

Source: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

(Available at www.censusindia.gov.in)

On aspects of economic growth, although AP did not do as well as the other states in southern India, its performance was consistently better than Bihar's. Though the per capita income in both the states was reported to be lower than the national average, AP remained closer to the national average while Bihar was the worst performing state among all the Indian states. To highlight this, in real terms in 1993–94, while the all-India average per capita income was nearly Rs7,700 and AP had a per capita income of Rs 7,416, the per capita income in Bihar at Rs 3,037 was just half or less than half of the national average and the AP average.⁷⁶ Assessments of poverty too confirmed that AP did better than Bihar. While estimates of poverty for the 1990s have been a matter of intense controversy and scholars point out that economic measures by themselves do not reveal the multi-

⁷⁶ Directorate of Economics and Statistics provide data for respective state governments, while the All India figures are reported by the Central Statistical Organisation, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

dimensional nature of poverty, various assessments made in this regard place AP ahead of Bihar. These include the official estimates for poverty, based on NSS household surveys adjusted figures reported by Deaton and Dreze (2002), and the estimates of the Tendulkar Committee (Tendulkar, Radha Krishna, and Sengupta 2009).⁷⁷ According to the revised estimates of the Tendulkar Committee (Tendulkar et al. 2009), in 2004–05 nearly 30 per cent of the population in AP and 54 per cent in Bihar were below the poverty line, while at the all-India level 37.2 of the population was below the poverty line.

So, the two important caveats to the argument about similarities in background in two states relate to differences in the dynamics of growth and poverty, and the recent notable demographic trend of a declining child population in AP.

However, the two key similarities of context, which led me to select AP and Bihar, from among other Indian states, are their status as “educationally backward states” and political power being in the hands of new political leaderships. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, AP and Bihar were both classified among the “educationally backward states”, eligible for additional resources, including those from international donor agencies. While the general conditions for federal resource transfers to states in India provides for a weightage on population and economic backwardness, the specific idea that educational backwardness of Indian states was itself a ground for greater central assistance had become an accepted measure in federal policies by this time. Special schemes of the federal Ministry of Education and bilateral aid solicited by it were the specific instruments for extending such support.

One of the first explicit policy statements on which states were educationally backward can be found in the recommendations for the Non-Formal Education (NFE) programme of the government (see Chapter 3 for details on this programme). The working group of the Planning Commission which recommended the scheme observed that 74 per cent of the non-enrolled children were in the “educationally backward states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal”. Assam was later added to this list, and the problem of universalisation of

⁷⁷ See Deaton and Dreze (2002) for detailed discussion on the problems with respect to the methods of poverty estimation in India.

elementary education was seen essentially as a problem of these states (Kapoor 1992 p. 3).⁷⁸

As educationally backwards states, both AP and Bihar received early attention from donors and the federal government—enhanced central assistance mobilised through external finances for implementing school reform was available since the early 1990s through state specific projects called the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Programme (APPEP) and the Bihar Education Programme (BEP). Further, external aid provided through APPEP and BEP predated the large-scale funds mobilised by the Centre for the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) launched in 1995 as a national programme for school reform. These two programmes (APPEP and BEP) were considered frontrunners in the sense that lessons from their implementation subsequently influenced the setting up of the agenda for DPEP.

Political leadership at the time of reform was also similar in both the states, with power in the hands of regional parties having their roots in opposing the nationally dominant Congress Party—the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in AP and the Janata Dal in Bihar. Closeness to regional sentiments, a new political base among deprived social castes, and a promise for greater welfare for the deprived led to natural expectations about political leaders adopting pro-poor policy changes with ease in both the states. These similarities in the policy and political context led to expectations of similar outcomes of reforms and of the role that the political leaders would play in the process.

Besides, there were also similarities in the institutional arrangements for implementing reforms in the two states (and in all other states implementing DPEP and thereafter the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* [SSA])—a new institutional structure in the form of a “society” was set up in both the states to facilitate some autonomy for the reform implementation process away from the control of vested interests and biased institutions.

⁷⁸ Set up in 1978, the working group had a broader mandate of assessing the roadmap to universalisation of elementary education for children 6-14 years of age. It recommended the setting up of the non-formal education programme to cater to the needs of working children and others who could not attend schools in normal hours.

4.2 Problems and Constraints in School Education at the Beginning of the 1990s

Although government policy classified the two states as “educationally backward” at the beginning of the 1990s, there was a paucity of analytical literature or evaluation studies on the situation of school education in either of the states. Lacey, Cooper, and Torrance (1993 pp. 542, 546) note this in the context of AP, where they find that a research tradition was lacking in the state education department, which engaged only in collecting “descriptive statistics”. Besides, there were issues of reliability of government data, a fact that I too have taken note of earlier (in Chapter 3). Although the problems seemed to have been commonly understood by policymakers and aid agencies, documentation is surprisingly scant. Therefore, some indication of the problems before the school education sector can be had on the basis of observations by experts or policymakers associated with the APPEP and the BEP, and from the small amount of literature that is available on these programmes. On the basis of these, three key constraints appeared to characterise the school education system in both the states: institutional constraints, lack of resources especially for innovations, and inequities in participation.

The school education system in AP was described as a “classic bureaucracy”, where decisions were processed hierarchically and centrally, leading to considerable delays (Lacey et al. 1993 p. 542). Teachers had little avenue either for promotion or professional development, as neither the directorate, nor the training institutions for teachers (known as the District Institutes of Educational Technology or DIETs) absorbed school teachers. The educational budget spent on elementary school education was large in both the states—in 1990–91, AP spent nearly 46 per cent of its total resources for education in elementary schools, while Bihar spent an even higher 63 per cent of its total education budget on elementary education. However, nearly all of it was spent on salaries, and very little was left for measures for improving quality such as teacher training or on textbooks.⁷⁹ A very small share of elementary education expenditure in each state was invested in the creation

⁷⁹ The real picture of what use this large expenditure on elementary education was put to, is provided by the disaggregated expenditure by sub-heads—in 1990, AP spent only 1.3 per cent of its resources for elementary education on teacher training, and Bihar only 0.7 per cent.

of new capacity and this is evident in the small proportion of elementary education budgets that each state spent as “Plan” expenditure—7.5 per cent in AP and 11.2 per cent in Bihar (see Table 4.2). This led to schools operating under a severe resource crunch, unable to purchase any supplies or teaching learning materials based on their needs, or on the discretion of the teacher. The situation was only exacerbated by the focus on “centralised supply” of teaching materials in centrally sponsored programmes such as Operation Blackboard.⁸⁰

Table 4.2: Selected Characteristics of Elementary Education Expenditure in Educationally Backward States, Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar 1990–91

	Share of Elementary Education (%) in Total Expenditure on Education	Share of Elementary Education (%) in Gross State Domestic Product	Total Elementary Education Expenditure in Real terms (in Rs million)	Per-Pupil Elementary Education Expenditure in Real terms (in Rs per annum)	Share of Plan Expenditure in Total Expenditure on Elementary Education
Andhra Pradesh	46.0	1.3	6,167	789	7.5
Bihar	62.7	2.8	10,191	1,028	11.2
Educationally Backward States (Average)	56.6	-	7,489	907	-

Source: Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure in Education, 1990-91, MoHRD, GoI; Whole sale Price Index 1993/94 series from Ministry of Statistics Planning and Implementation, GoI; Selected Educational Statistics, MoHRD, for various years

Notes: Educationally Backward States-AP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh; Total Elementary Education Expenditure is in Rs million at constant prices, 1993–94=100.

The additional constraints in Bihar were on account of poor infrastructure for teacher training. While AP had nearly 23 district-level training institutes (one for each district) in 1993–94, Bihar had only one, and even that was not an initiative of the line department of education. Following a change in the government’s policy, teacher training was not considered a requirement for recruiting teachers, therefore institutions for teacher training were no longer considered necessary by the state. Hence, the resources sanctioned by the federal government for setting up teacher training institutions remained unutilised (Government of Bihar 2007a p.58).

⁸⁰ I owe these observations to Professor Kenneth King’s note based on a seminar given by him in Hyderabad July 19, 1994. The seminar was chaired by the Secretary of Education, GoAP, Mr J.S. Sarma, and attended by senior staff of the state’s Department of Education, and the APPEP project staff. This is cited in the bibliography as King (1994 a). Professor King is Professor Emeritus, University of Edinburgh.

Although AP did better than Bihar, there were inequities in participation on the basis of socio-economic disadvantages of social-caste, gender, poverty, and residence in rural areas in both states. For the primary stage of schooling, attendance rates of 6–10 year old girls was lower by 12 percentage points as compared to boys in AP, and by 17 percentage points in Bihar. Also, this was higher than the difference reported at the all-India level—11 percentage points.⁸¹ Further, the gender inequities were acute among disadvantaged social castes—the participation of SC girls in AP and Bihar was 19 and 27 percentage points lower respectively than the participation of boys of the same caste (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: The School Participation Rate for Children Aged 6–10 Years, by Social Caste and Gender, 1993–94

State	All Castes		Scheduled Castes		Scheduled Tribes		Other Castes (including OBCs)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Andhra Pradesh	79.3	66.6	75.0	55.9	69.0	47.9	81.3	70.6
Bihar	62.2	45.0	50.5	23.6	34.5	21.5	66.5	50.8

Source: NSSO, 50th Round: Employment-Unemployment Survey, 1993–94.

Notes: The “School Participation Rate” refers to percentage of children currently attending any educational institution; OBC-Other Backward Castes.

⁸¹ At the All-India level, the school participation rate for boys of age 6-10 years was reported (by the NSSO 1993-94) to be nearly 77 per cent, and for girls of the same age it was nearly 66 per cent.

Table 4.4: The School Participation Rate for Children Aged 6–10 Years, by Place of Residence and Economic Status in Rural Areas, 1993–94

State	Place of residence			Economic status in rural areas		
	Rural (a)	Urban (b)	Difference in percentage points between (b) and (a)	Top Quintile (c)	Bottom Quintile (d)	Difference in percentage points between (d) and (c)
Andhra Pradesh	68.1	86.8	18.7	82.3	56.8	25.5
Bihar	52.6	77.7	25.1	72.3	33.5	38.8

Source: NSSO, 50th Round: Employment-Unemployment Survey, 1993-94.

Notes: The 'School Participation Rate' refers to percentage of children of age 6-10, currently attending any educational institution.

Residence in rural areas also severely restricted school participation, especially for the poor. Table 4.4 shows that the school participation rate for children aged 6–10 years was nearly 22 percentage points lower for those residing in rural areas of AP, as compared to those living in the urban areas of the state, and nearly 25 percentage points lower for those residing in rural areas of Bihar as compared to those living in its urban areas. There were marked differences in school participation by economic status in rural areas. In Table 4.4 we can see that the school participation rates of the poorest strata of rural society, represented by the “bottom-most quintile” are lower than the richest strata represented by the “top-most quintile” by 26 percentage points in AP, and 39 percentage points in Bihar respectively.⁸²

The challenges were indeed formidable, and a new set of policies and enhanced federal resources were expected to provide the “window of opportunity” to enable the states to overcome them. How the state governments would make use of these opportunities was therefore critical. In the next section I argue that based on prevailing

⁸² The ‘top-most quintile’ refers to the top 20 per cent all individuals in rural areas based on their monthly per capita household consumption expenditure, and the ‘bottom-most quintile’ to the bottom 20 per cent of all individuals in rural based on their monthly per capita household consumption expenditure.

political circumstances, and prior history of implementing reforms, the chances for adoption of change seemed fairly high in both states.

4.3 Expectations for Change in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar: A Few Propositions

The specific aspects of political circumstances in AP and Bihar, which I consider as supportive of the chances for successful introduction and adoption of new policies in school education, relate to the timing of a new political leadership in each state and the agenda and the nature of the social alliance supportive of their rule. These arguments are based on the literature that is available on the political conditions for adoption of successful policy reforms. On the basis of country case studies of economic policy reforms, these studies point out that some of the political conditions indicative of favourable reform adoption include the timing—soon after a government’s coming to power (also referred to as the “honeymoon effect”), especially with a strong legislative mandate, presence of a weak and fragmented opposition on which past failures can be blamed, a visionary leader with a strong commitment and ability to take risks, and the presence of a strong team of “technocrats” (Nelson 1990; Wallis 1999; Williamson and Haggard 1994).⁸³ It appeared that many of these political conditions were indeed present in AP and Bihar at the time of adoption of education reform in 1995, including a stable leadership during the phase of consolidation of reforms.

Although there were significant differences of context between Chandrababu Naidu’s leadership in AP, and Lalu Yadav’s in Bihar, both were considered significant regional leaders, and were in power for fairly long periods at the time of implementation of reforms. The differences I refer to relate mainly to the nature of the mandate that they enjoyed, their agenda of rule, and the social coalitions which were supportive of their leadership. For different reasons, each of these aspects of their rule could be counted among political circumstances that were likely to have favoured radical policy changes in school education.

⁸³ See Williamson (1994) for a comprehensive overview of over a dozen country case studies, highlighting specially the role of politics in the policy reform process. This is based on the proceedings of a conference organised for this purpose by the Institute for International Economics, Washington DC, in 1993.

Andhra Pradesh: Naidu Projects Himself as a “New Leader”

There was no “honeymoon effect” of a new government in the case of AP, as Naidu came to power following what was widely referred to as a “palace coup” in August 1995 (Mooij 2007; Reddy 2002). That description of the power of a new government having a strong political mandate, was indeed more apt for his father-in-law N.T. Rama Rao (NTR), who had led his party the Telugu Desam Party, to a sweeping victory in the elections for the state Legislative Assembly in 1994. Naidu supported NTR in those elections. But following a change in circumstances, the family and a majority of the legislators supported Naidu’s back-door entry to power as the Chief Minister of AP in 1995. The TDP under NTR had come to power on populist political promises such as free rice and housing for the poor, and prohibition on sale of liquor, and had the image of being pro-poor, pro-peasants, and pro-women.

Given this background, Naidu’s challenge was to carve out a different “image” for himself, and thus out-do the appeal of his predecessor NTR’s populism. He achieved this by adopting the image of a moderniser and a champion of liberalisation oriented policies. Characteristic elements of his new agenda were the emphasis on the use of information technology, approaching the World Bank for a policy loan for economic restructuring,⁸⁴ and promoting a global image of the state in economic forums such as those at Davos. While Suri (2004) dubbed him as a “CEO in the arena of democracy”, Rudolph and Rudolph (2001) noted the “iconisation” of the status of Naidu, and argued that this was the consequence of sharing of sovereignty with the states in the Indian federal system (whereas earlier it had vested only with the Centre in Delhi), in a changed scenario of a liberalising India.

Naidu’s new agenda for rule had the backing of powerful business and media houses in the state, the urban elite, and regionally in a new entrepreneurial class which came up in coastal AP.⁸⁵ Besides, a number of backward castes too came to support the TDP because of their disenchantment with the Congress Party. However, it was not as

⁸⁴ The Andhra Pradesh Economic Restructuring Programme provided a policy loan for US\$545 million to the state government in 1998. This was the first ever comprehensive loan to a state government in India.

⁸⁵ See Upadhyya (1997) for details on the emergence of this regional entrepreneurial class from rich peasants of coastal Andhra.

much the mandate that Naidu had, or the social alliance backing his rule, as much as his reliance on the image of being a moderniser, representing a distinct break from the past, which was the most compelling political argument in favour of adopting school reforms. Reforming schools and a focus on primary education was presented as an element of the growth model that Naidu promoted. This emphasis could be seen in the Vision 2020 document (prepared by the noted global consulting firm McKinsey), which outlined the blueprint of a growth-path for the state following the neo-liberal economic model (Government of Andhra Pradesh 1999), the Andhra Pradesh Economic Restructuring Programme loan from the World Bank, which provided funds for covering all districts of the state under the DPEP, and in the *Janambhumi* Development Programme associated with Naidu. However, scholars noted that here were no other major policy announcements in primary education by the government besides implementing the donor funded DPEP, indicating that the government's talk about reforming primary education were more in the nature of a rhetoric, aimed at creating a "hype" around the more explicit elements of the development path he was pursuing via a commitment to market principles (Mooij 2007 p.37).

Bihar: Strong Mandate and Political Populism

The political conditions of a new government with a strong mandate, having the freedom of political manoeuvre soon after assuming office—referred to in the literature as the "honeymoon effect" (Williamson and Haggard 1994 p.571)—as well as a weak opposition in disarray upon whom the blame of past mistakes could be laid were both present in Bihar between 1995 and 2004–05, the period under focus in so far as the role of political leaders in the reform process is being analysed in this research. In this year, the Janata Dal came to power with an absolute majority of its own, under the leadership of Lalu Prasad Yadav.⁸⁶

The social basis of the Janata Dal was among the upwardly mobile backward castes which had benefited from earlier government programmes for land reforms and the green

⁸⁶ See Kumar (2002) for an analysis of the rise of Lalu Prasad Yadav led- RJD in the 1995 elections for the state legislative Assembly.

revolution in agriculture. Besides, Lalu Yadav had an appeal of personality by which he was characterised as the messiah of the poor.⁸⁷ In fact in his pro-poor posturing and appeal for “dignity” for backward castes, bore many similarities to Naidu’s predecessor NTR’s pro-poor posturing and appeal for *Telugu* pride. However, the comparison between the pro-poor image and populism of the two leaders could not be carried too far, as NTR’s regime was characterised by a plethora of substantive transfers to the poor, whereas Lalu’s made promises to the poor in his *garib-railis* (literally, processions of the poor) to give them free *dhoti-saris* (items of clothing for men and women respectively) on subsidised rates, but was never really implemented. Hauser notes this to be one more aspect of his failure to deliver as an administrator and indeed the ‘inability to apprehend the very idea of systematic development and change, leave alone to engage in its implementation’ (Hauser 1997 p. 2601).

The clear orientation of the TDP and RJD leaders towards the poor and dispossessed, a strong support base of these parties among the backward castes, and regional roots that were critical of the Centre in the case of TDP, or the promise to “get money from Delhi to help the poor of Bihar” by RJD leader Lalu Prasad in Bihar, and the opportunities in favour of pro-poor reform in school education were similarly poised in the two states. It seemed a safe assumption that the pro-poor and regional direction of their political positions would imply that implementing school reforms that benefitted the poor, especially the disadvantaged social-castes (who voted for the RJD in large numbers), would be a matter of political gains as well.

Introduction of New Ideas and Enhanced Administrative Capability

Similarly poised in both the states were the advantages that they had in terms of having a prior history with implementing educational reform. The contributions of APPEP and BEP included introducing new ideas in the states’ educational bureaucracies, creating state-level teams of implementers, and also some changes in administrative practises. All of these

⁸⁷ See Hauser (1997) for an account of the appeal of Lalu’s charisma during the 1997 elections, even though the political rule in the state was characterised by “widespread anarchy and administrative atrophy”.

helped to enhance the capability of the state and its functionaries in adopting changes in the future.

In AP, the APPEP set up a project office, project director, and staff, and all of these interacted with the state's Department of Education (DoE), creating a culture of interaction between two different (indeed contrasting) types of organisations—slow moving bureaucracy of the state DoE, with its focus on “routine”, and which was very remote from teaching issues, and a project which lay emphasis on “innovation” and pedagogy. The second notable organisational contribution of the APPEP was at the *mandal* level, and was related to giving a new role to teachers as skilled trainers. Based on the belief that talented primary school teachers could be identified and given the training for, followed by the responsibility, to teach their colleagues, the new role of the *Mandal* Resource Person (MRP), was created at the *mandal* level (King 1994a p.4).

The pedagogic changes were to be seen in new textbooks and in the DIETs, where new methods of pre-service and in-service teacher training were being put in place. Teacher centres were set up for a cluster of schools to encourage regular interaction and peer-learning among teachers and address on-going concerns (rather than one-time training inputs alone). The strength of some of these changes was apparent in the efforts of the state to adapt a federal initiative for teacher training—the “Special Orientation of Primary Teachers”, to include an orientation to both central initiatives, as well as state level innovations. King (1994a) noted this as a more holistic approach to “what have often in India been seen as a set of separate schemes and initiatives” (King 1994a p.2).

A lasting innovation of the APPEP, and one which was adopted by the DPEP as a part of the technical design prescribed by the latter programme for the country as a whole, was that of encouraging small, but meaningful expenditure on innovation (that is, expenditure on non-salary items) at the school level. This included a small amount of money for school supplies—Rs 500 to be spent by each school and Rs 2,000 for teacher centres. Besides, a small grant was also given for occasional meetings and conferences of teachers and teacher trainers. How significant this small grant from the project was in encouraging innovation, and some flexibility of decision making at the school level, can be

seen from the fact that this practice was adopted under the DPEP, and was noted in all reviews of the programme as one of its lasting contributions (Pandey 2000)

The BEP too introduced new ideas and administrative practices, although these were somewhat different from those of the APPEP. In comparison to the APPEP, the BEP worked outside of the state government's DoE and its field staff. Also, while the focus of the APPEP was on institutions, BEP's main focus was on community mobilisation. The programme was intended to "initiate a dialogue on Bihar's educational reconstruction", with the hope that the social forces which would combine to work for this new agenda included the Bihari youth, dissatisfied with the way things were in the state, and running a number of voluntary agencies and activist groups, dedicated teachers, and public spirited people, among others (Government of Bihar and Government of India 1990 pp. 1, 7). The institutional innovations reflected both these aspects—of being located outside the traditional, institutional structure of the government, and on community mobilisation.

Two of the notable changes were as follows: first, housing the BEP in a new "autonomous society", with a specially selected officer of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) to lead it, but with other staff being drawn from both the government and non-government sectors.⁸⁸ Second related to the setting up of community bodies known as the Village Education Committees (VECs), to be selected by the *aam-sabha* (or general council of all the villagers), but in reality the members were selected on the basis of "instructions from above", meaning the BEP bureaucracy (UNICEF 1994 p.9). The VECs helped in the distribution of textbooks, donation of land for schools, and construction of school buildings. Along with the *Mahila Samakhya*, a programme for women's empowerment which worked along-with the BEP in Bihar, the VECs were expected to be community bodies to which the schools, non-formal education centres, and teachers would be accountable.⁸⁹ Both these institutional innovations—of an autonomous society at the state level to house the DPEP, and for schools to have community bodies, were accepted in

⁸⁸ Officers of the Indian Administrative Service are recruited and trained by the Centre, and assigned to state-level cadres. They are generalists who lead the administrative machinery of the state governments, and also the Centre. Their responsibilities include both policy formulation and implementation.

⁸⁹ The Mahila Samakhya was a programme for women's empowerment, funded by the Dutch government, and run by the Centre's Department of Education in selected states. Details on the programme can be had from <http://education.nic.in/ms/Genesis.pdf>

principle by the DPEP, with some flexibility in design.⁹⁰ In fact, decisions with respect to providing small school grants and teacher grants were to be spent in consultation with the community bodies—this was an adaptation of the APPEP innovation, along with the BEP practice.

⁹⁰ The states were given flexibility in terms of choosing the type of “community bodies” they set up. These varied from “Parent Teachers Association”, “Mother Teachers Association”, “School Management Committees”, and “Village Education Committees”.

4.4 The Puzzle of Contrasting Outcomes

Some idea of the changes brought about by reforms came from changes in intermediate policy variables like public expenditures, which I have taken note of in Chapter 3. However, increased expenditures by themselves do not necessarily signify more equitable changes or institutional reforms. Besides, I have already taken note of the problems with the government's reporting of its achievements in school education; one reliable way of assessing "outcomes" are the NSS reports on school participation. On the basis of various NSS rounds from 1993–94 to 2004–05, I compare the trends in primary school participation, disaggregated by gender and socio-economic status in the two states (Tables 4.5–4.8). The results show that the achievement of increase in total participation rates in the case of AP reflects a consistency over the entire time period under consideration, a greater participation of disadvantaged social categories, and also greater socio-economic equity in participation. These three are missing in the case of Bihar, especially for the first time period under consideration—between 1993–94 and 1999–2000. In this time period, total school participation rates for primary school-age children in the state declined at first, and only after that did they show an upward trend.

In AP, the participation rates increased, gender and rural-urban gaps declined, and the participation of disadvantaged social-castes and the poor, especially in rural areas also increased. In 1993–94, the total school participation rates for primary school age children in the state was 72.8 per cent, marginally higher than the all-India level of 71.7 per cent. This increased by nearly 12 percentage points between 1993–94 and 1999–2000, and then again by nearly 11 percentage points, between 1999–2000 and 2004–05. By 2004–05, nearly a decade after educational reform was introduced, over 95 per cent of the primary school age children were reported to be attending school in the state. Critical in achieving these high rates of participation was the increasing participation of girls and the narrowing down of gender differences—that is, difference between the school participation rates for boys and girls. This difference was nearly 12.7 percentage points in 1993–94; however, by 1999–2000, it had gone down to 5.6 percentage points. By 2004–05, the state was

achieving near-parity in the participation for boys and girls at the primary stage (see Table 4.5).

Participation rates for children from rural areas increased as well—from 68.1 per cent in 1993–94 to 94.3 per cent in 2004–05, an increase of 26 percentage points. The high rural-urban gap characteristic of school participation in 1993–94 was also reduced substantially. Rural participation rates were lower than urban rates by nearly 19 percentage points in 1993–94; this gap was reduced to about 4 percentage points in 2004–05.

There were other gains indicative of greater equity in AP—the enrolment rates for the poorest strata among the rural poor (represented by the bottom-most quintile in Table 4.8), and the severely disadvantaged social categories of SCs and STs, all increased by over 30 percentage points between 1993–94 and 2004–05, and reported participation rates above 90 per cent in the 61st round of household surveys, held in 2004–05 (see Tables 4.7 and 4.8).

In Bihar, as I have already noted, the total participation rates declined at first by nearly 4 percentage points—from nearly 55 to 51 per cent between 1993–94 and 1999–2000. There was an increase thereafter (between 1999–2000 and 2004–05), but against this low base of 1999–2000. The total participation rates were nearly 68 per cent in 2004–05, an increase of nearly 17 percentage points over 1999–2000. Participation of girls, and of children in rural areas, increased too. For girls the participation rates increased by nearly 18 percentage points over the decade (from 45 per cent in 1993–94 to 63 per cent in 2004–05) and in rural areas by 12 percentage points (from 52.6 per cent in 1993–94 to 66.9 per cent in 2004–05). Gender gap and differences in school participation rates between rural and urban areas also declined. However, even with these positive changes over the decade, the progress in Bihar was slower than that in AP (see Tables 4.5 and 4.6).

Moreover, notwithstanding the increase in school participation rates reported by the data for 2004–05, the low participation rates for SCs (52.3 per cent) and for the poorest strata among the rural poor (50.3 per cent, represented by the bottom-most quintile in Table 4.8), are representative of the unfinished agenda of achieving equity in primary school participation intended to be a universal right of all children (see Tables 4.7 and 4.8).

Table 4.5: The School Participation Rate for Children Aged 6–10 Years, by Gender, 1993–94 and 2004–05

State	1993–94			1999–2000			2004–05		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Andhra Pradesh	79.3	66.6	72.8	87.3	81.7	84.6	96.4	93.9	95.2
Bihar	62.2	45.0	54.9	58.4	42.6	51.3	72.3	62.7	68.0
All-India	77.0	65.6	71.7	81.2	72.7	77.2	88.7	85.0	86.9

Source: National Sample Survey Organization, Rounds 50(schedule 10), 55(schedule 10), 61(schedule 10)

Notes: The 'School Participation Rate' refers to percentage of children of age 6-10, currently attending any educational institution.

Table 4.6: The School Participation Rate for Children Aged 6–10 Years, by Place of Residence, 1993–94 and 2004–05

State	1993–94			1999–2000			2004–05		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Andhra Pradesh	68.1	86.8	72.8	82.6	89.9	84.6	94.3	98.0	95.2
Bihar	52.6	77.7	54.9	49.5	68.5	51.3	66.9	80.5	68.0

Source: National Sample Survey Organization, Rounds 50(schedule 10), 55(schedule 10), 61(schedule 10)

Notes: The 'School Participation Rate' refers to percentage of children of age 6-10, currently attending any educational institution.

Table 4.7: The School Participation Rate for Children Aged 6–10 Years, by Social Caste, 1993–94 and 2004–05

State	1993–94			1999–2000				2004–05			
	ST	SC	Others	ST	SC	OBC	Others	ST	SC	OBC	Others
Andhra Pradesh	59.2	65.4	75.8	66.6	85.4	83.3	91.7	91.0	95.6	94.8	97.1
Bihar	29.8	40.1	59.6	49.5	37.5	52.5	62.4	67.8	52.3	71.1	79.1

Source: National Sample Survey Organization, Rounds 50(schedule 10), 55(schedule 10), 61(schedule 10)

Notes: (1) The 'School Participation Rate' refers to percentage of children of age 6-10, currently attending any educational institution. (2) ST-Scheduled Tribe; SC- ScheduledCaste; OBC –Other Backward Caste. For 1993-94, "OBC" is combined with "Others"

Table 4.8: The School Participation Rate for Children Aged 6–10 Years, by Economic Status in Rural Areas, 1993–94 and 2004–05

State	1993–94			1999–2000			2004–05		
	Topmost Quintile	Bottom Quintile	Difference in percentage points	Topmost Quintile	Bottom Quintile	Difference in percentage points	Topmost Quintile	Bottom Quintile	Difference in percentage points
Andhra Pradesh	82.3	56.8	25.5	86.2	74.2	12	97	91.4	5.6
Bihar	72.3	33.5	38.8	69.3	31.6	37.7	86.7	50.3	36.4

Source: National Sample Survey Organization, Rounds 50(schedule 10), 55(schedule 10), 61(schedule 10)

Notes: (1) The 'School Participation Rate' refers to percentage of children, aged 6-10 years, currently attending any educational institution (2) Top-most quintile: Top 20 per cent of all the individuals based on their monthly per capita household consumption expenditure, Bottom-most quintile: Bottom 20 per cent of all the individuals based on their monthly per capita household consumption expenditure.

4.5 Conclusion: The Need to Examine the Process of Policy Implementation

Notwithstanding the similarities of context and the enabling framework of federal opportunities, what we can see in the case of AP and Bihar, is a story of sub-national variation. The “puzzling outcomes” seen in the form of divergent trajectories of school participation in the two states are the result of the intervening role of agents—political leaders and policymakers. I now turn my attention towards understanding how they have made use of these opportunities, and compare the strategies that they adopted in managing the contending ideas, interests, and institutions in the process of school reform.

Chapter 5

Reform Opponents: Teachers, Unions, and the Implementation of Change

5.1 Introduction

This chapter compares the expectations of the “conventional paradigm”⁹¹ about the control of powerful interest groups over the policy process, which leads to the expected role of teachers as reform opponents, as against the empirical evidence from Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Bihar on the impediments to reform brought about by their collective action. I examine specifically how teacher interests were managed during the course of implementing reforms in AP and Bihar, and the nature of organised and collective action of teacher unions in opposing the efforts for improving the quality of primary schools in these states.

The management process in the two states varied—in AP the strategy was one of realigning policies for resolving the grievances of teachers, and in the process weakening the hold of unions over teachers, while also playing on inter-union rivalries and accommodating the demands of the union with the largest numbers. Bihar provides a contrast, in that both the direction of policies and the government’s approach towards unions was one of confrontation. In both the cases, there was no formidable challenge to the reform process from the unions, although for different reasons. I argue that the political dynamics did not mechanically fit the “stylised” view of teacher unions opposing reform. It mattered how the process was managed during the course of reform implementation, as did the variations in party-political affiliations, structures, and the competitiveness of the unions in the two states.

The two principal sources of information for this chapter are an analysis of state government documents relating to teacher policy issues, and interviews conducted with

⁹¹ I borrow the term “conventional paradigm” from Geddes (1995 pp.198–9), and use it interchangeably with the terms “formal political economy” or “new political economy”. According to Geddes, conventional paradigm includes the assumptions and arguments of pluralism and the economists’ stylised view of politics. It is characterised by a focus on interest groups or classes, and on material interests, to the exclusion of all others. I have already discussed the critique of such an approach to politics and the policy reform process in Chapters 1 and 2.

state level policymakers and the leaders of teacher unions. The interviews with office bearers and leaders of teacher unions were conducted at the state level, and at the headquarters of the selected districts in AP and Bihar.⁹² In Hyderabad I interviewed office bearers and the leaders of nine primary school teachers' unions, and 16 more in the selected districts of East Godavari and Mahabubnagar. Since unions varied in their strength in the districts, I interviewed leaders only of those that were considered "influential" in the region and had offices in the district headquarters. In Bihar I interviewed the office bearer and leader of only one primary school teachers' union in Patna, and eight more in the selected districts of Gaya and Purnia (see Appendix 3 for a list of the teacher union leaders interviewed).

This chapter has five sections. The first gives an overview of the problems and constraints faced by the two states with regard to their existing policies for teachers. The second describes the unfurling of the new policy sequence for overcoming the constraints viewed as critical in each state. The slow evolution of contrasting policies with respect to teachers, and the involvement of multiple institutions, including the judiciary, shows the complex and different nature of policy reforms in school education, as compared to those in economic policy (a theme I have discussed earlier in this thesis). I observe that changes in teacher policies in the two states were in a sense "embedded",⁹³ as they emerged within the context of institutional constraints in each state. However, the choices made are not simply a response to these constraints. There is a reflection of autonomy from the control of vested interests and institutions in the policy choices made by politicians as well as administrators. The third section examines the political role of teacher interests, organised collectively as unions. I argue that teacher unions in the two states played different roles in the process of implementing policy change on account of variations in their structure, inter-union competition, and partisan affiliations. The fourth section assesses the extent to which

⁹² I had initially planned to conduct interviews with union leaders in each selected *mandal*/block of the four districts. However, since there was a very thin presence of teachers' unions in the *mandals* of Andhra Pradesh, and no presence of teachers' unions at the block level in Bihar, I did not find respondents. The strong presence of the unions in the district headquarters in both states was indicative that this was where unions were needed the most—for resolving a gamut of teacher grievances at the office of the District Education Officer/District Superintendent of Education.

⁹³ The term "embedded" is commonly used in institutional sociology, and refers to state institutions being tied to, or rooted in society. The term gained wide usage following Peter Evans' (1995) book *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation*.

the collective action of unions posed a threat to reform implementation, and how the leadership for educational reform dealt with the unions in each state. Finally, the conclusion evaluates the comparative difference in approach and strategy in the management of teacher interests, and also how far these differences account for the variations in outcomes in the two states. In the light of the empirical evidence on teachers' and their unions in AP and Bihar, this section also evaluates some of the postulates of conventional theory regarding the circumscribing role of "special interests" in the process of change.

5.2 Problems and Constraints in Teacher Policies

The main challenges in reform implementation existed with respect to adequate numbers and the competence of teachers, and transparent and professional policies for the deployment, and transfer of teachers. For most of the 1970s and 1980s, the provision for school education in India developed rapidly and in a centralised manner,⁹⁴ focussing mainly on the expansion of infrastructure and personnel. The process of centralisation added to the complexity of each of these challenges.

Some idea of the process of expansion can be gained from successive rounds of the All India Education Survey (AIES). These indicate that in 1973 nearly 90 per cent of the country's people were served by primary schools within a kilometre of their place of residence; however, by 2002 this figure had increased to nearly 99 per cent of the population (National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) 1999, 2002). Besides, school teaching was one of the fastest growing professions in the country, with a growth rate of 11.3 per cent for primary school teachers between 1986 and 1993 (NCERT 1995, cited in World Bank 1997 p.143). Official statistics indicate that there were nearly 1.64 million primary school teachers, teaching 70.37 million enrolled students in 1991 (Ministry of Human Resource Development *Selected Educational Statistics* 1990–91).

⁹⁴ Centralisation was the result of the states taking over schools managed by local bodies and under private management, but receiving grants from the government. There was no uniform national policy in this regard, and states differed in the specific steps with which this process was achieved. NCIS (2002 pp.4, 9–11) provides details of the process of centralisation in Kerala. Also, Kingdon and Muzammil (2003 pp.138–41) document this process for Uttar Pradesh.

Yet there were severe constraints on the adequacy and quality of teachers in primary schools, reflected partly in the high pupil-teacher ratios shown in Table 5.1. In 1990–91 the official policy norm was of one teacher for 40 students, and the prevailing national average was 42 students for each teacher. AP had a pupil-teacher ratio of 50:1 and Bihar of 53:1. Reform efforts meant increasing enrolments at the primary stage, and there was therefore pressure for the immediate recruitment of teachers.

Constraints on resources constituted a severe challenge in making new recruitments. But equally challenging were issues of the process to be followed—selection procedures characterised by discretion and lack of transparency were frequently challenged in the courts (Sharma 1999 p.1597), and the approval of posts of additional teachers required the concurrence of state Departments of Education (DoEs)—which was often slow and difficult to get (Sipahimalani-Rao 2004 p. 9).

The second issue—which finds significant mention in the donor, policy, and research literature—is that of the poor quality of teachers (see NCERT 1994 pp.18–22; PROBE report 1999 pp. 56–7; World Bank 1997 pp.153–7). The extent of the problem is only partly reflected in the figures for trained teachers shown in Table 5.1, as this data reflects only the “pre-service” training received by teachers before they joined the profession, and is in no way a reflection of their poor skills on the job.⁹⁵ The need to improve the quality of teachers by providing training had been one of the central concerns of the first phase of educational reform policies (following the National Policy on Education 1986). The Teacher Education scheme, funded by domestic resources, established District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) in districts across the country for this purpose.⁹⁶ But the DIETs were focused mainly on providing pre-service training, and they developed in a somewhat uneven manner across the country (National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration 2000a; Ramachandran and Sharma

⁹⁵ I have noted earlier that there was no systematic data at this time on the learning quality of students, and the World Bank (1997 pp. 153–7) cites Bashir (1994) to illustrate the poor subject knowledge existing among teachers and their lack of teaching skills—all pointing to the poor quality of the pre-service training imparted to teachers.

⁹⁶Ramachandran and Sharma (2009 p. 24) note that 461 such institutions had been set up in districts across India by 2001.

2009 p.24).⁹⁷ Based on a review of policy documents, Ramachandran and Sharma (2009 p.24) also confirm this uneven development, and they note that the DIETs were somewhat better developed in the educationally advanced southern states of the country. The second phase of educational reform policies, under the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), placed strong emphasis on in-service training and established new institutions at the sub-district level of the block, and at school clusters each consisting of 8–10 schools.⁹⁸

Table 5.1: Pupil-Teacher Ratio and the Percentage Share of Trained Teachers in Primary Schools, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 1990–91 to 2007–08

State	% Trained Teachers				Pupil-Teacher Ratio			
	1990–91	1995–96	2000–01	2007–08	1990–91	1995–96	2000–01	2007–08
Andhra Pradesh	97.0	97	97	94	53	50	45	32
Bihar*	87.9	86	95*	85*	50	55	67	68
All India	89.8	88	86	90	42	47	43	47

Source: "Selected Educational Statistics", Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD), Government of India (Gol). Various Years.

Notes: (i) The pupil-teacher ratio is defined as the number of pupils enrolled in primary schools divided by the number of teachers; trained status refers to pre-service training only. (ii) *Figures for Bihar for 2000–01 and 2007–08 are for the new state of Bihar, created after its separation from Jharkhand in 2000.

The third main challenge related to policies for the management of teachers and was mainly the issue of their deployment and transfer. In both states, teachers feared deployment to rural areas, and tried very hard to get postings to schools in urban areas. In the absence of clear vacancies, many teachers were simply "attached" to schools in urban

⁹⁷ The NIEPA (2000a, pp. iii, 37, 67) Report notes that in West Bengal no DIETs had been opened at the time of the review, Bihar had made no recruitment of faculty for its DIETs, and in Uttar Pradesh barely 57 per cent of the DIETs had regular electricity connections.

⁹⁸ Pandey (2000 pp. 23–24) considers this one of the most crucial elements of the DPEP strategy. New institutions for in-service teacher training called "Cluster Resource Centres" were set up for 8–10 schools, and for every 8–10 clusters a "Block Resource Centre" was established. The DPEP made no interventions through the DIETs. But the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* combined both initiatives for teacher training in the first phase (DIETs) and under DPEP (BRCs and CRCs).

areas by a (mis)use of discretion by the education authorities. This produced an effective depletion of teachers available for schools in rural areas. Besides, teachers in both states faced very similar problems with respect to what were referred to as “individual grievances”—these grievances related to issues such as timely payment of salaries and increments, promotion, leave, and other benefits. These grievances were to be dealt with by the government’s district-level education officers.⁹⁹ Since there were a very large number of government teachers, there was a huge backlog of cases to be dealt with. In AP, teachers complained of the “authoritarian” use of power by the District Education Officer (DEO).¹⁰⁰ In Bihar, the former secretary of education of the state government complained that teachers had been reduced to the status of “class four” employees of the state due to the process of centralisation.¹⁰¹ Teachers had to run to the government secretariat in Patna for the redress of any grievance, and it was said that “a powerless teacher had to deal with a very powerful bureaucracy”.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ In Andhra Pradesh, the District Education Officer (DEO) and in Bihar the District Superintendent of Education (DSE) respectively were the officers responsible for primary school teachers. In June 2011, GoB effected reforms in the structure of educational administration of the districts and the post of DSE was abolished. So in Bihar too, it is now the DEO who heads the district administration for education, including primary schools.

¹⁰⁰ Personal interviews with Mr D.N. Murthy, District Project Coordinator, SSA, East Godavari district, Kakinada, 28 February 2006; Mr Sudhakar Reddy, leader of Panchayati Raj Teachers’ Union, Hyderabad, 13 July 2005.

¹⁰¹ “Class Four” refers to the lowest category of government employees, also known as “Group D” employees.

¹⁰² Personal interview with Mr B.K. Sinha, Additional Secretary Panchayati Raj, Government of India, Sardar Patel Bhavan, New Delhi, 13 February 2008. Sinha was Education Secretary, Government of Bihar in 2002.

With respect to these issues, the federal reform policies designed at the Centre only addressed the need to improve teacher quality through in-service training. Policies for recruitment, transfers and posting, and other matters related to service conditions were left solely within the purview of the states. It is interesting that, despite similarities in the nature of the problems, AP and Bihar took contrasting approaches towards managing their teachers. Thus, in AP state policy directed itself towards removing discretion and putting in place professional and transparent policies for teacher management, whereas in Bihar the thrust of state policy was to reverse the direction of centralisation.

5.3 Contrasting Strategies for Managing Teachers in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar

Context for Changes in Teacher Policy

There were several nuances of the context in which changes in teacher policy were introduced in the two states. Because the federal guidelines had not prescribed any ground rules on the type of changes to be made, or the procedure to be followed, the contending ideas for reform, and also the lead actors and institutions, were those at the state level. As far as the institutions were concerned, there was a certain dualism—in that the “state level societies”, which were the hub of all the activities for educational reform, were given no role in determining teacher policies.¹⁰³ This was a domain in which the state DoEs alone could operate. While the societies acted as a pressure group, calling for reform in teacher policies and improvement of the quality and accountability of teachers, the DoE was seen as an institution that was the bearer of an old set of policies and the hub of activity for vested interests.

Given this context, reform in teacher policy was led completely by each state’s political leadership. It was designed by state level policymakers, and was separate from all other federally guided reform initiatives. Pressure from teachers and their unions placed effective constraints on policy and political actors. However, the courts proved to be a very

¹⁰³The Centre directly transferred the external resources for educational reform to these societies. In relation to the Annual Work Plans for DPEP and SSA, specific activities related to teachers, such as teacher training, were organised by the state level societies.

significant institutional actor—their observations and orders played a crucial role in shaping both the politics of teachers and the directions of policy in the states.

Policy Dilemma: Strengthening Formal Recruitment Procedures for Regular Teachers or Decentralisation and Teachers on Contract?

Contending ideas in the country regarding which new policies to adopt came from diverse initiatives in various states. The north Indian states of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh (MP) took the lead in decentralising teacher recruitments and in hiring para-teachers; regular teachers were declared a “dying cadre” in MP (Sharma 1999 p.1598). The southern states had a different approach, in that they did not reverse the policies of centralisation or hire para-teachers. Karnataka, for example, which has been called “a front-runner among Indian states in introducing many pioneering reforms in teacher recruitment and transfers” focused on consolidating its formal school system and centralised recruitment policies in the course of implementing primary education reform (see Sipahimalani-Rao 2004 p. 2).

5.4 The Direction of Teacher Policies in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 1990–2011

Removing Discretion and Regular Recruitments in AP

The leadership role with respect to changes in teacher policy in AP was taken by the state DoE. It included three important measures—the centralisation of recruitment procedures, the removal of discretion and instigation of greater transparency in transfers and postings, and improving the career path of teachers by increasing avenues for their promotion (see Table 5.2). I now address each of these measures.

First, there was a commitment by the state to fill vacancies regularly by recruiting full-time teachers. The policy reform in recruitment procedures introduced a written test organised by the Directorate of School Education (Government of Andhra Pradesh 2001), and the process was accepted by both teachers and their unions as being a transparent and fair one. Since complaints about the new recruitment process were few, there was no pending dispute in the courts about this issue. The resolve of the state towards recruiting full-time teachers, was reiterated in its policy towards contract teachers:

while the state did recruit para-teachers on contract, known as *vidya volunteers*, this was seen only as a temporary measure either to provide additional teachers where the increase in student enrolments so demanded, or as an interim measure while regular recruitments were in the pipeline. *Vidya volunteers* were never seen as a substitute for regular teachers.¹⁰⁴

Second, the government took extensive measures for rationalising teacher postings and transfers. The new criteria introduced were considered objective and transparent by the teachers. Put in place through successive orders of the government, the main feature of this policy was a clear specification of the rules for eligibility for transfer and a significant reduction of discretion (which had led to arbitrary transfers and favoured postings). Furthermore, the process was marked by a lot of transparency, with vacancies in schools and teacher applications for transfers being posted on websites for everyone to see (Table 5.2).

¹⁰⁴ The Principal Secretary School Education, GoAP, Mr D. SambasivaRao, confirmed that this indeed remains the government policy until today. The latest round of recruitment is to be held in January 2012 for nearly 50,000 teacher positions. Personal Interview, Mr D.Sambasiva Rao, 21 December, 2011.

Table 5.2: Recent Teacher Policy Reforms in Andhra Pradesh—Dimensions and Content

Year(s)	Dimension	Source(s) of change	Content
2000-01			
	Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Andhra Pradesh Direct Recruitment of Teachers (Scheme of Selected Rules 2000), AP Gazette Extraordinary Part-I, 23-01-2001. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular teachers recruited after centralised test New procedure takes into account academic and professional qualification of teachers, and past work experience
2002-2011			
	Transfer and Posting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government Order Ms.No.46, May 10, 2002 Government Order Ms.No.102, August 5, 2005 Government Order Ms.No.65, May 19, 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constitutes a competent authority at district level for this purpose, Provides clear rules Narrow areas of discretion. Mandal-wise vacancy placed on website Teachers, who have completed eight years in a particular place, put on a transfer list. Teachers awarded points- for having served in remote areas. Based on points, priority list prepared and placed on website Areas of discretion and arbitrary transfers defined; Scope narrowed for arbitrary action
1998-2005			
	Promotion Avenues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government Order Ms .No.505, November 16, 1998. Government Order Ms.No.538 November 20, 1998. Ordinance 12/2005 (enacted as Act 27/2005 of the GoAP, issued as Government.Order.Ms.No.95 and 96, July.25, 2005. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common service rules for recruitment and promotions for government and panchayati raj teachers Merger of cadre increases avenues for promotion and vacancies for postings Reiterates unified cadre for promotion

The third important initiative was the creation of new opportunities of work and faster grievance redress for teachers. Here the reforms were beneficiaries of a prior administrative reform effort which created the new sub-district unit of the *mandal*. This was a much smaller unit of administration (at the sub-district level) compared to the “block” in Bihar, and it was created by Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao in 1986. Further, each *mandal* had a *Mandal* Education Officer (MEO), who worked as a combined unit for reform initiatives under DPEP and SSA, as well also performing the regular activities of the government’s DoE. In practical terms, this meant that the MEO was now responsible both for motivating teachers to participate in activities meant to further the objectives of reform programmes, and also responding to their grievances. Since the number of teachers in a *mandal* was small—approximately 200–300, in comparison to 600–700 under the Block Education Officer (BEO) in Bihar—it was easier for the MEO to respond effectively to teacher grievances and win their trust. Besides, as part of the reform initiatives, additional functionaries were appointed under the MEO—the *Mandal* Resource Persons (MRPs) who were given the responsibility of making regular school visits to provide on-site support for teaching and other academic activities. It was mainly the primary school teachers, and especially the younger ones among them, who chose to become MRPs. Thus, the reform process opened up a new avenue of work and professional satisfaction for many of the younger teachers for whom participation in DPEP and SSA training provided the chance of opportunity and influence close to the administration.

Because the post of the MEO was also to be filled partly by the promotion of school teachers, the educational administration at the sub-district level came to have a composition that was more acceptable to teachers. Oppositional activity of the unions in the districts was directed towards the office of the DEO, and not the MEO—leaving the implementation of reform in schools undisturbed. Teacher grievances on account of delays in things like the sanction of leave, salary computation, promotions, transfer and postings, or any other service matter, were directed towards the district. And the reform team was seen as concerned only with academic and school improvement issues.

Institutional Deadlock and Contract Teachers in Bihar

In Bihar, the key issue was that of the recruitment of teachers for the filling of regular vacancies. There was conflict between the government, the teachers, and the courts on this issue, and in this process it became clear that the existing policy with regard to the recruitment of teachers was not a settled covenant. As a result, no recruitment of teachers was made in the state in the 1990s, reflecting the absence of clear policy thinking and political will.

Until the early 1990s, the Bihar government did not have a recruitment policy. Instead, it relied on a candidate's academic qualifications (having at least 12 years of schooling) and pre-service training as professional qualifications. The practice was to assign a "priority" for the year in which a potential candidate had received pre-service training, and to prepare a district level "panel" of eligible candidates in this manner. Whenever a vacancy arose, teachers were simply "absorbed" from the respective district level panels. In 1993–94, the state government, led by Lalu Prasad Yadav, questioned the quality of pre-service training, and changed the recruitment policy. A centralised test conducted by the Bihar Public Service Commission, and no regard to professional qualification of pre-service training, were the main features of this new policy (see Table 5.3). Approximately 35,000 teachers were selected through this new process in 1993–94. But the new policy was challenged in the state's High Court by the *Berozgaar Shikshak Sangha*—a union of unemployed and "trained" youth, who were waiting to be employed as teachers under the old system. The court amended the new policy, and directed the government to provide one year long induction training to all teachers recruited under the new policy, and candidates on the district-level panel were given a chance to appear in the test. A large number failed, despite being given three opportunities to pass the test. The government felt vindicated in its stand about the poor quality of training imparted in pre-service teacher training institutions.

Table 5.3: Recent Changes to Teacher Recruitment Policy in Bihar—Dimensions and Content

Year(s)	Dimension	Source(s) of change	Content
1993–94	Recruitment of full-time teachers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Recruitment through centralised testing – Only performance in test matters – Professional qualification not taken into account
2002	Para-teachers on short-term contract	<i>Panchayat Shiksha Mitra (Anubandh Par Niyojan)</i> Guideline, June 21, 2002, Published in the Bihar Gazette Extraordinary, No.250, Patna, GoB.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Appointments made by <i>panchayats</i> – Lowers academic qualification to 10 years of schooling, (<i>earlier policy of 12 years of schooling</i>) – Professional qualification not taken into account – Person should be resident of the <i>panchayat</i> where she is selected as a teacher – 11 month contract to teachers
2006		<i>Panchayat Elementary Teacher (Employment and Service Conditions)</i> , Rules 2006, GoB.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Decentralised recruitment process—devolves power of recruitment to local bodies – Abolishes the concept of para-teachers (<i>Panchayat Shiksha Mitra</i>), and all of them to be absorbed as regular teachers – Priority in recruitment to trained teachers – Teachers to be paid a fixed honorarium, and no increments or benefits

Parallel to the changes in the recruitment process, the government also decided to close down private teacher training institutes.¹⁰⁵ The political leaders of the state felt that the “unemployed but trained youth” organised as the *Berozgaar Shikshak Sangha* were a “vested interest” since they mainly belonged to the upper castes. Political leaders also felt

¹⁰⁵ The Education Secretary, GoB, Mr M.M. Jha informed me that nearly 60 teacher training institutes were closed down in the state by former Chief Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav (Personal interview with Mr M.M. Jha, Old Secretariat Patna, 5 June 2007).

that the court was being partisan in striking down a fair process of recruitment by testing.¹⁰⁶

Following interventions by the court, the new policy was abandoned, and a very small number of teachers were recruited in the 1990s. But with nearly 4–5 per cent of teachers retiring every year, vacancies were on the rise. By 2005–06, nearly 100,000 teacher positions were vacant in Bihar, and 90 per cent of these vacancies were in primary schools. Table 5.4 provides the Government of Bihar’s estimate of the number of vacancies. The central government took serious note of the situation, especially because a large share of the resources under the SSA was coming from federal resources. It was clear that no progress could be made on implementing reforms without the teachers.

In June 2002, the state government led by Rabri Devi formulated new rules for the decentralised recruitment of para-teachers by *panchayats* (see Table 5.3). Nearly 35,000 *Panchayat Shiksha Mitras* (PSMs) were recruited on this basis. In the absence of clear guidelines on selection procedures, and a lack of effective monitoring from above, malpractices became rampant. This policy too was challenged in court by persons eligible to be appointed as teachers under the old criteria. In a strongly worded judgement in 2005, the Patna High Court observed of its educational system and politicians that: “the state which has not been appointing any primary teacher since 1990, has generated generations of illiterates in the past twenty years.”¹⁰⁷ The operative part of the judgement, asked the Government of Bihar to formulate a plan for teacher recruitment, wherein trained teachers were to be employed as a matter of priority.

¹⁰⁶Looking back on these policy measures of the 1990s, the Education Secretary, GoB remarked in an interview in 2007: “His (*Mr Lalu Yadav’s*) view was that the people who come to training (i.e. teacher training) were all from the upper caste. So he felt that we (that is, the government) should recruit through tests”(Personal interview with Mr M.M. Jha, Old Secretariat Patna, 5 June 2007).

¹⁰⁷Personal interview with Mr M.M. Jha, Old Secretariat Patna, 5 June 2007. This observation of the High Court has also been cited in news reports: See “Bihar government ordered to appoint 35,540 trained teachers” (12 September 2009). Available at:<http://www.sify.com/news/bihar-government-ordered-to-appoint-35-540-trained-teachers-news-education-jmju4dabjhh.html>, downloaded on 21 November 2011.

Table 5.4: Teacher Vacancy Position in Elementary Schools in Bihar, 1990 and 2005–06

Year	Sanctioned Posts	Number of Teacher Vacancies
1990	Primary – 176,000	Primary – 35,000
	Secondary – 30,000	Secondary – 3,000
	Total – 206,000	Total – 38,000
1995	Primary – 176,000	Primary – 40,000
	Secondary – 30,000	Secondary – 5,000
	Total – 206,000	Total – 45,000
2000	Primary – 176,000	Primary – 70,000
	Secondary – 30,000	Secondary – 12,000
	Total – 206,000	Total – 82,000
2005–06	Primary – 420,000	Primary – 90,000
	Secondary – 40,000	Secondary – 10,000
	Total – 460,000	Total – 100,000

Source: Personal Interview, Mr M.M. Jha, Education Secretary, Government of Bihar, 5 June, 2007.

Notes: (i) Primary includes grades I-V and secondary includes grades VI-VIII, (ii) The number of teacher vacancies are “estimated vacancies” for each of the years

Strategic retreats were made by the Government of Bihar in 2006–07, abandoning its earlier policy of confrontation with the courts and with unemployed but potential teachers. In a Special Leave Petition before the Supreme Court of India, the state government withdrew from the case, and assured the court that it would provide employment to trained candidates on priority. A clear set of rules—referred to as “Rules of 2006”—was formulated to specify the criteria and procedure for appointments, including reservations for Backward Castes (Government of Bihar 2006). The *panchayats* now have the responsibility of appointing primary school teachers. The new teachers are a

compromise between full time and para-teachers—they are paid a consolidated sum like contract teachers, but they do not have a pay scale or any other benefits. Unlike para-teachers, they are guaranteed security of tenure. However, the issues of a professional career path and social security are yet to be addressed, making them comparable to para-teachers in these respects.

The recruitment process that followed for over 230,000 teacher positions in Bihar was noted as one of the largest in the world, with over 8.7 million applicants.¹⁰⁸ The process is still to reach a measure of stability, with many complaints of irregularities, corruption, and nepotism, especially about the arbitrary use of power by the *mukhiya*. Of its own, the Government of Bihar has initiated a review to make the process fairer. It is clear from the complaints and reports of the review process that the implementation of decentralised policies for teacher recruitment also requires support from the state level.

The political leadership and policy entrepreneurs in Bihar seem to have moved ahead with this strategic move on teacher recruitment, breaking the deadlock with the courts. The state political leadership has devolved its powers to *panchayats*, and perhaps won their political support. As the onus for implementation of the new policy is no longer on the government's DoE, it is saved the burden of handling interventions from the court. What has now come up, however, are a variety of individual grievances related to irregularities in the recruitment procedure followed by the new “recruitment units” at the *panchayat* level. Apart from compliance and monitoring, what the system does need is a fair and quick process of grievance redress that is outside of the courts.

Strategic Management of Teacher Interests in AP, Confrontation with Interests and Institutions in Bihar

The government in AP acted in reforming policies in each of the major challenges identified with respect to teacher policies in the early 1990s, whereas the government in Bihar took the initiative only in the area of recruitment (see Table 5.5 for a comparative picture of policy initiatives). Indeed, some efforts were made in 2005 in Bihar on rationalising the transfer and posting policy. While the earlier policy was one of

¹⁰⁸ Job Zachariah and Nilesh Pandey, *Rapid Appraisal of Teacher Recruitment in Bihar*, UNICEF 2007.

consciously posting teachers away from their home village or block by district-wide transfers, service rules were amended to reverse this, and prioritise postings in the “home block” through a block level committee. These changes were welcomed by the teachers, but they were far from achieving the levels of transparency seen in AP or Karnataka. The unions complained that there was a “double establishment” that worked in the area of teacher transfers—that is, both the district and the block were points of authority.¹⁰⁹ B.K. Sinha, the former Secretary of Education, Government of Bihar, confirmed that the greater were the points of administrative intervention, the more were the chances of the use of discretionary authority and opportunities for rent-seeking.¹¹⁰ The reversal in teacher recruitment policies in 2006, however, made these efforts redundant.

More important was the sharp divergence in the direction of policies—increased centralisation and enhanced state power in AP, as compared to taking recourse to decentralisation in Bihar as a way to settle policy deadlocks, and perhaps gaining societal legitimacy for the state as the prime mover for pro-poor welfare action. Even with changes in government in the two states, the overall policy directions were not reversed.

As seen in Table 5.5, the overall thrust of policy reform in AP was to reduce the grievances of teachers and the exercise of arbitrary authority exerted over them, and so, win their support for implementing changes. In Bihar, the grievances of teachers persisted, and the attitude of the educational administration at the district and sub-district levels towards teachers did not change. Teachers were therefore weakly associated with reform efforts. Another noticeable difference is that strategic management of interests allowed the state in AP with greater leverage in the handling of disputes in court. The fact that there were fewer points of conflict and contest allowed policy changes to persist. In contrast, the policy reform process in Bihar was a deeply contested one, and policy changes had to be abandoned primarily because of the intervention of courts. The courts were independent institutions, and did not act simply at the behest of “vested interests”.

¹⁰⁹ Personal interview with Mr Mahendra Prasad Singh, *ArajpatritShikshakSangh*, Gaya district, Bihar, 3 October 2005.

¹¹⁰ Personal interview with Mr B.K. Sinha, Additional Secretary Panchayati Raj, Government of India, Sardar Patel Bhavan, New Delhi, 13 February 2008.

Table 5.5: Political Dynamics of Teacher Policy Reforms, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar

Initiative	Andhra Pradesh			Bihar		
	Dimensions of Change	Contest	Outcome	Dimensions of Change	Contest	Outcome
1. Recruitment <i>A. Regular Teachers</i>	-Recruitment by centralised test - Due weightage to academic and professional qualification, and past work-experience	Accepted by teachers and unions as a fair process	Policy persists	-Recruitment by centralised test - No weightage to professional qualification in new procedure	Conflict with those waiting to be employed as teachers -organised as <i>Berozgaar Shikshak Sangh</i>	-Policy challenged in court -Regular recruitment comes to a standstill -Policy abandoned
<i>B. Para-Teachers(on contract)</i>	-Adopted as a short-term measure -Do not substitute regular teachers	No conflict with teachers and unions	Policy persists	-Adopted as a long-term policy measure -Para-teachers to replace regular teachers	-Conflict with those waiting to be employed as teachers -Allegations of irregularity in appointments	Policy challenged in court -Poor quality of teachers -Policy abandoned
2. Transfer	-Transfer on the basis of transparent rules -Detailed rules evolve over time to narrow areas of discretion	Accepted by teachers and unions as a fair process	Policy persists	No initiative made by state	Grievances of regular teachers persist	Regular teachers not engaged in the reform process
3. Teacher Grievances -Creation of the Mandal and office of Mandal Education Officer (MEO)	-MEO handles fewer number of teachers -New promotion avenue for teachers as MEO -New work avenue as Mandal Resource Persons	Reliance of teachers on unions declines	-Easy resolution of teacher grievances -Avenues for work and promotion associate teachers directly with reforms	-No initiatives to associate sub-district administration with reforms	-Adversarial relations between BEO and teachers	Weak association of teachers with the reform process

5.5 The State and the Politics of Teachers Unions: Competition and Cooperation in Andhra Pradesh, Conflict and Opposition in Bihar

While the teacher unions in the two states differed in their strength, they were widely perceived as organisations that could wield political power to protect their own interests. Perhaps as anticipated opponents of the reform process, in neither state were they consulted during the course of formulating plans for change. But in the implementation phase, unions did not play the role expected of them according to formal theory. Thus, strong and competitive unions in AP did not stall reforms, nor did weak unions in Bihar guarantee major improvements in the school education system. Union-government relationships in the implementation of educational reform were strongly influenced by the strength of and competition among unions, as well as by their party-political affiliations. I now analyse the differences in strength and competitiveness and partisan affiliations of unions in both the states. I also assess the extent to which the existence of a cooperative relationship in AP, as opposed to a more confrontational one in Bihar, could be the result of these differences.

Competing Unions in AP, Monopoly Power in Bihar

Andhra Pradesh

AP presents a picture of vibrant unions, actively competing with each other to enlist greater support of teachers, and influence state policies. There are at least nine unions which have offices at the state headquarters, and are considered to be “recognised unions” (see Table 5.6). Not all of these unions are evenly spread across the state; they also vary in strength in different regions. The *Panchayati Raj* Teachers Union (PRTU) and the State Teachers Union (STU) are reported to be strong in the Telengana region, the Andhra Pradesh United Teachers Federation (AP-UTF) in the coastal region, and the AP-UTF and PRTU in the Rayalseema region. Accordingly, in Mahabubnagar district, the STU and PRTU were strong unions, whereas in East Godavari it was the AP-UTF that was the strongest. Regular elections were reported to be held every two years by most of these unions, even though the top-level leadership was said to alternate between a chosen few, and the emergence of really new leaders was rare.

Apart from variations in their regional presence, the unions also differed in the strength that they commanded, the issues around which they had historically originated, and their method of political association. While it may be difficult to state an objective basis on which one can classify any of these as a “strong” union, one way to assess their strength is the number of their members. But a caveat here is that these numbers are provided by the unions themselves. And they may be unreliable on several counts. Thus, all unions admit the possibility of dual membership, and the total number of members of the unions exceeds the figures for the total number of teachers for the state. Also, the criteria of membership may differ between unions. The Government Teachers Association (GTA), as the name suggests, is a union of government teachers alone. The Telengana Rajya Teachers Union (TRTU), a new union, claims to be an organisation of teachers in the Telengana region alone. By definition, therefore, these two unions have a much smaller membership. The PRTU consists of teachers appointed under the local self-government bodies, and seems to have the largest number of teachers followed by the AP-UTF (see Table 5.6). Having a larger membership is certainly an advantage in wielding political influence and extracting concessions.

Table 5.6: Data on the Teacher Unions in Andhra Pradesh

	Name of Unions	Year in which established	Number of Members*	Political affiliation
1	Andhra Pradesh Teachers Federation (APTF) (Split now into two groups, APTF1938 and APTF257)	1947	70,000	Indian National Congress (INC)
2	Andhra Pradesh United Teachers Federation (APUTF)	August 10, 1974	1,10,000	Communist Party of India –Marxist (CPM)
3	Andhra Pradesh UpadhyaySangh	1984	50,000	BharatiyaJanata Party (BJP)/ RashtriyaSwayamSewakSangh (RSS).
4	Democratic Teachers Federation	2000	30,000	Parties with a progressive outlook (Ultra left groups, referred to as 'Naxals')
5	Government Teachers Association	1982	30,000	
6	Panchayati Raj Teachers Union** (PRTU)	1978	1,20,000	Independent-strikes a rapport with the party in power
7	State Teachers Union (STU)	1946 in the Telengana region, under Government of the Nizam rulers. In the regions of Rayalseema and Coastal Andhra, it was set up in 1963	84,300	Communist Party of India (CPI)

Source: Personal compilation by the author; see the notes below.

Notes:

(i) * The number of members is based on claims of teachers' unions themselves. There is no objective way of determining how many members a union has, as unions claim to have a following higher than they actually do. In addition, unions also accept the possibility of dual membership—one teacher may be a member of more than one union. However, teachers, officials of the DoE, GoAP, and the unions have a fair estimate of the relative strength of the various unions in the three regions of AP. I have cross-verified claims of membership by asking for this figure from the state as well as district level representatives of the unions. In case of difference between the figures reported by the state level/district level functionary, the lower figure is reported.

(ii) ** This union now officially calls itself the "Progressive Recognised Teachers Union" on the ground that since 1991 the state government has given to Panchayati Raj teachers, the status of government teachers. This has been challenged by the GTA and the dispute is pending in the federal court—the Supreme Court of India. However, it is still referred to by its old name.

Bihar

Bihar presents a contrasting picture. I found only one large union representing primary teachers in the state, and in the districts there was no formal set-up comparable to that seen in AP.

The *Bihar Rajya Prathamik Shikshak Sangh* (BPSS) is the main union with a presence in the state capital. Like the PRTU in AP, the BPSS is not formally associated with any political party, but in the past it has been closely associated with the Congress Party. The other prominent union in Bihar is the *Arajpatrit* (non-gazetted) *Prarambhik Shikshak Sangh* (APSS)—formally affiliated to the Communist Party of India (CPI). Publicly, APSS leaders regard themselves as free of the control of any political party. Thus, one leader stated: “We are only imbued with the colour of the Communist Party, we are a *laathi* (a stick) that can navigate its own way, we do not need clutches of a political party”.¹¹¹ The union claims a membership of 85,000 at the state level, and notes that its relationship with the BPSS is competitive at the primary level (that is, grades I–V), whereas they are collaborative and support of each other at the secondary school level (that is, grades I–VIII).

Both unions have a very weak presence in the districts and blocks. In one of the field districts—Gaya—which is reported to have a history of a strong teachers’ movement, the BPSS was said to have a large following. But unlike what was observed in AP, I did not find a formal office for either of the unions in the headquarters of the district. The union leaders sat outside the district education office every evening. I met with and interviewed them at a road-side tea-stall, opposite the district education office in Gaya.

The other unique feature is the presence of a “union” of potential candidates, likely to have been employed as teachers under the earlier policies of recruitment (that is, the policies in existence prior to 1993–94), which employed teachers from a list of candidates who had received pre-service teacher training. This was the BSS (unemployed teachers

¹¹¹Personal interview with Mr Mahendra Prasad Singh, *Arajpatrit Shikshak Sangh*, Gaya District, Bihar, 3 October 2005.

association) discussed in an earlier section. Although it is not strictly a “teachers’ union”, teacher policy directions in the state were nevertheless strongly affected by the demands of this group. It may be useful here to note that the BSS consisted of nearly 60,000 unemployed youth. And senior policymakers of the Government of Bihar admitted that this group had the power to influence the thinking of lawyers and judges in the state.¹¹² In Gaya district, I also came across another union—the *Pragatisheel Shikshak Sangh*—whose demands were similar to the BSS. The reversal of the centralised recruitment policy in the state was in theory expected to break the power of unions. But contrary to this assumption, the *Panchayat Shiksha Mitras*—that is, para-teachers recruited by local bodies—also organised themselves as a union in Gaya primarily to demand higher wages, and security of tenure, similar to what happened with the *Shiksha Karmis* in MP (Sharma 1999 p. 1599).

The BPSS and APSS have a monopoly of power over teachers, and a very weak process of internal democracy within their organisations. Although both unions claimed to have a formal constitution that stipulated the regular holding of elections at the block, district, and state levels, the process was observed more or less as a token.¹¹³ In the BPSS, Mr Brij Nandan Sharma has remained the head since 1967, and he recollected having been elected unopposed last time (in December 2006).¹¹⁴ The rival union APSS, asserts that the key difference between itself and the BPSS is that “...while BPSS is a dictatorship, we are a democracy”, and further (in a lighter vein) that Mr Brij Nandan Sharma (the head of BPSS) “...is the chairman at all levels—right from his own village in Jehanabad, to the district headquarters of the larger Gaya district, and the state headquarter in Patna”.¹¹⁵

Currently, what makes the potential of both unions for collective action largely irrelevant is the reversal of teacher policies in the state—in particular, new teachers are appointed by the *panchayats* and do not belong to a state-wide cadre. The key issue that the BPSS took up was at least two decades ago—the demand for the abolition of local

¹¹² Personal interview with Mr Arunish Chawla, Special Secretary cum Additional Finance Commissioner, Resources, Government of Bihar, Patna, 4 June 2007.

¹¹³ Formally, delegates elected at the district level form the “electoral college” for state level elections. In reality, the same person is elected unopposed.

¹¹⁴ Personal interview with Mr Brij Nandan Sharma, *Bihar Rajya Prathamik Shikshak Sangh*, Patna 4 June, 2007.

¹¹⁵ Personal interview with Mr Mahendra Prasad Singh, *Arajpatrit Shikshak Sangh*, Gaya district, Bihar, 3 October 2005.

control over teacher appointments and service conditions, followed by the state's takeover of privately managed schools governed by local bodies. These demands were fulfilled by the then Congress Chief Minister Jagan Nath Mishra in the course of the 1970s and 1980s.¹¹⁶ Interestingly, things have now come full circle in the state, with changes in recruitment policy reversing this very policy of centralisation.

Inter-union Competition and the Desire for Government Status

The presence of strong and competitive unions in AP placed certain pressure on the state to compete with the unions to gain the support of teachers (so assisting the implementation of reforms). Political leaders and policymakers worked together to design policies to gain the support of teachers for the reform process, even while they played competitive politics with the unions, extending support to those that claimed to have the largest membership. In removing discretion in recruitment and transfer policies, and facilitating redress of grievances, the state in AP reduced somewhat the reliance of teachers on unions in relation to these matters.

In winning the cooperation of the unions, in AP the state directly intervened in the competitive rivalry between them—especially as it took the side of the *Panchayati Raj* teachers in their struggle to gain the status of “government teachers”. Those teachers who already had this status fought to exclude those who did not, using both state policy and court intervention to try to achieve these goals. There are approximately 30,000 government teachers, under the DoE, and are organised as the Government Teachers Association (GTA). The *Panchayati Raj* Teachers Union has almost 275,000 members and works under the *Panchayati Raj* Department. The two categories of teachers differ in their relative status and service conditions. In particular, government teachers have a better career path with avenues for promotion up to the level of District Education Officers (DEOs), and the luxury of getting largely urban postings, whereas *Panchayati Raj* teachers can only rise up to the rank of a school headmaster, and are usually posted in remote rural areas.

¹¹⁶ The government formally took over the management and control of all primary and middle schools in the state in 1976, but its order became effective retrospectively from 1 January 1971 (GoB 2007a p. 17).

Responding to the demands of *Panchayati Raj* teachers in 1991, the government in AP extended the “Subordinate Services Rules” to include *Panchayati Raj* Teachers through Government Order (GO) number 40. Thereafter, the state constituted uniform service rules for both categories of teachers (GO numbers 505 and 538, issued in 1998). A legal battle ensued as the GTA challenged these government orders in the Administrative Tribunal, and then in the High Court. The court struck down the rules as being invalid in September 2003. It was now the turn of the PRTU to take the issue to the Supreme Court, where the case is still being heard. Meanwhile, the Chief Minister used extraordinary powers of governance by ordinance, and issued an order in 2005 in favour of the PRTU.

Another way in which the state of Andhra Pradesh “signalled” the grant of government status was by including PRTU, STU, and the AP-UTF as permanent members in the “Civil Services Joint Staff Council of Andhra Pradesh” both in the state and its districts. Apart from the status, this measure gives the unions proximity to senior government officials. This proximity is useful for the unions as they are able to connect with the officers informally, and pursue their agenda. It also increases the credibility of the unions among teachers.

Such is the pervasive agreement across the unions on this matter that all, barring the GTA, have put aside their internal, partisan or ideological differences, and support the PRTU on this issue. The AP-UTF leaders in East Godavari put it very succinctly: “We differentiate between the issues before teachers at the macro-level and the micro-level. At the macro-level, the main issue is the Common Service Rules. Only 8 per cent of the teachers are government teachers, 92 per cent are *Panchayati Raj* teachers.” Even while the AP-UTF does not approve of the “political” nature of the PRTU, and its proximity to the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), they say they are united on this “common issue”.¹¹⁷

Thus, acting on the subject of common service rules, the state political leadership in AP has been able to “signal” that it is acting on the demands of the unions, winning the broad support of teachers and the two largest unions. The unions too have gained more by collaborative strategies, rather than through confrontation and strikes. Support from the

¹¹⁷ Personal interview with K. Sathi Raju, AP-UTF General Secretary, East Godavari District, 28 February 2006.

state enhances the capacity of the unions to act effectively on behalf of teachers, giving them greater incentives for gaining concessions from the state rather than opposing it. This cooperative relationship is the result of strategic considerations on the part of both—the state political leaders and the unions; it also forms the backdrop in which teachers’ support for training and quality improvement in schools has been obtained. What I witnessed in the state, therefore, was not a battle between the teachers’ unions and the state, but the use of political skills by the state for the management of interests, and this in turn shaped the nature of the demands made by teachers.

5.6 Politics and Unions: Bargaining Unions in Andhra Pradesh, Caste and Partisan Affiliations in Bihar

In theory, it is assumed that the political power of the unions makes it difficult for the state to initiate policy changes, especially those which impose costs on teachers. The assumption that teacher unions are directly connected to competitive politics and political parties, and that this is the reason why they wield enormous power, is common in the research literature (for example, see Béteille 2009 and Kingdon and Muzammil 2003). In both AP and Bihar, I found that most unions had an explicit association with political parties, and that a few of their leaders did indeed become members of the state or central legislature.¹¹⁸ Since the collective power of the teacher unions was vested in their leadership, many of them did find the opportunity to join politics after having served as leaders of unions. Further, in AP, each major political party had a teachers’ union affiliated to it (see Table 5.6). However, in Bihar only the APSS was formally associated with the CPI.

Three observations serve as a caveat to concluding that the power of unions is a direct consequence of their direct association with competitive party politics. First, the union with the largest following in AP is the PRTU, which prefers only a strategic alliance with the party currently in power. Second, in some cases I found that the strength of the

¹¹⁸ In Andhra Pradesh, Mr K.Narayan of the CPI served as an office bearer with the State Teachers’ Union, and was a member of the central legislature—the Parliament; Mr Laksmana Murthy of the CPI-M served as an office-bearer with the AP-UTF, AMD was a member of the state legislature—the Assembly. In Bihar, Mr .Shatrugan Prasad Sinha of the CPI backed *Arajpatrit Prarambhik Shikshak Sangh* had been a member of both the state and central legislatures.

union was greater than the strength of the political party with which it was associated—for example, the AP-UTF was considered the second strongest union in AP, and was formally aligned with the CPI-M. But its significance as a teachers’ union exceeded the significance of the CPI-M as a political party. Third, most of the national parties listed in Table 5.6 have a political base in Bihar too, but unlike in AP, they do not have formally affiliated teachers’ unions. Perhaps the competitive scenario of teacher unions in AP was an incentive for the political parties as well to have their own affiliated unions.

Andhra Pradesh

I found that it was the ability to extract concessions from the state which was crucial to understanding the “power” of unions. Unions easily compromise on the oppositional postures they adopt in order to get state support. The PRTU in AP, for instance, considers strikes and opposition to the government in power as being an inappropriate strategy of teacher mobilisation. Further, even unions associated with parties of the left—the AP-UTF associated with the CPI-M, and the STU associated with the CPI, did not consider strikes as an effective weapon.¹¹⁹ In Bihar too, the BPSS believed primarily in making pleas and petitions to the government, and it found strike an ineffective weapon. The task of managing teacher interests in a scenario where unions are competing for the loyalty of teachers relies greatly on the state as a strategic political actor, which can change the overall context of teacher grievances with its power of authoritative decision making. Teachers’ unions value this capacity of the state, and for them the promise to be able to effectively influence government decisions is what is critical in keeping their members loyal to the unions and recruiting new members. These are strong incentives for adopting strategies of cooperation.

Bihar

Even though the BPSS in Bihar was like the PRTU—that is, not formally aligned with any political party—it lost its bargaining power because it was viewed as having partisan and caste affiliations by the political class as well as by policymakers. Established in 1935–36

¹¹⁹ Leaders of the STU, associated with the CPI recalled that the last strike launched by them was in 1986. Personal interview with Mr K. Subburaju, Jeyaraju K., and D. VenkatRao, State Teachers’ Union, Kakinada, East Godavari district, 27 February 2006.

during the movement for India's independence, its current President, Mr Brij Nandan Sharma, admits the upper caste affiliation, when he states that "leaders of the *Bhumihar* caste (an upper caste) played an important role in setting up this union". In terms of political party affiliations, the BPSS formally maintained a distance from political parties, but it admitted that the Congress Party under Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra had been most responsive to teacher demands. While Sharma asserted that the currently ruling party, the JD(U), had been the least responsive to teacher demands, his own son served as a minister of cabinet rank in the JD(U) government.¹²⁰ The rival union, the APSS, also acknowledged the proximity of BPSS with the Congress Party, and its own with the CPI. The APSS is also known to have a dominance of the upper castes, especially *Bhumihars*.¹²¹

What is evident from this is that neither the independent bargaining strength of the BPSS and its extracting concessions from the Congress Party in the past, nor the formal affiliation of the APSS with the CPI (even having some union leaders as elected legislators) actually increased the strength of the unions. These two important unions were not the repositories of institutional or political power that could rally mass agitations and block change. The lack of an inter-union competitive structure and vibrant field organisations diminished their identity as representative of teacher interests, and as effective demand groups asking for the resolution of teacher grievances through state action. Their proximity to political power did not enhance their "voice" in raising issues related to teachers, or their ability to extract concessions from the state. The weakening hold of the unions was reinforced by their dwindling support on account of teachers retiring every year without corresponding replacements. Union-government relations were characterised more by policies of confrontation and conflict, than by any effort to win over teachers to implement the reform agenda. The unions were marginal to the process of policy reform and politics in Bihar.

¹²⁰ Personal interview with Mr Brij Nandan Sharma, *Bihar Rajya Prathamik Shikshak Sangh*, Patna, 4 June 2007.

¹²¹ Personal interview with Mr Mahendra Prasad Singh, *Arajpatrit Shikshak Sangh*, Gaya district, Bihar, 3 October 2005.

5.7 Unions and the Reform Process: Local Cooperation in Andhra Pradesh, Indifference in Bihar

Andhra Pradesh

The strategies of cooperation and the skilful negotiations of the government that I have discussed in the previous sections were critical in ensuring that teacher unions did not derail the reform agenda. Leaders of all the large unions confirmed their “support” to reform. On the ground, however, there was variation in terms of how far the unions were actually working for reform in the districts in AP. The PRTU and the STU were large and influential unions in Mahabubnagar. However, the reform efforts were led and sustained by the DoE officials—mainly the MEOs and the MRPs. The unions were concerned primarily in dealing with grievances of teachers at the district education office, and on some irregularities in the recently effected large-scale transfer of teachers in the district. East Godavari presented a contrasting picture—the AP-UTF is very closely linked with reform efforts in the district. The reform team (DPEP/SSA project office) has many officers who have served as office bearers of the AP-UTF in the past.

Bihar

Initially, when reforms were started with the Bihar Education Project (BEP) in 1990, there seemed to be enthusiasm towards involving teachers in the process, and taking the unions into confidence. “We had a meeting with the teachers’ union leaders and the education secretary at the state level. We were not undermining their (that is, the teachers) authority, or suspending them from their jobs. Our venture was small. So teachers were not against us. Also, a number of old teachers were associated with the BEP. Mr Pandey (the former Principal of Netarhat residential school, a government school in Bihar set up as a model of excellence) was a part of our team in Ranchi”, said Mr Vijay Raghavan, the first State Project Director of the BEP.¹²² BEP’s vision document referred to as the “Brown Book” (Government of Bihar and Government of India 1990 pp. 3–4) called for the questioning of certain aspects of “conventional wisdom” on public affairs, and this was to be the basis for

¹²² Personal interview with Mr Vijay Raghavan, Industrial Development Commissioner, Government of Bihar, New Secretariat Patna, 5 June 2007.

policy reform under the BEP. One of these principles that the BEP questioned was a belief related to teachers, namely:

3.2.3 that teachers are politicised; therefore no significant change can be made in their conduct and effectiveness

Considering this to be a prejudice without basis in fact, the vision document emphasised the centrality of teachers to the changes planned under the BEP. It also called for forging alliances with people who could help to make it successful, including “political parties of all hues, teachers, organisations, employers, and trade unions”—a reform coalition, in other words. Union leader Sharma confirmed his agreement, when he said that the aim of the BEP was to improve education, keeping the centrality of the teacher in mind.¹²³

One of the major efforts of the reform team under the BEP was the evolution of the 10-day residential in-service training for teachers, called the *Ujala* module.¹²⁴ Widely noted at the national level for its participatory nature and teacher focus, the head of the reform team, the then State Project Director of the BEP, Mr M.M. Jha, noted after his participation in one of the *Ujala* trainings: “It (that is, the training) demonstrated that if teachers are treated with respect and trust, they could play their rightful role in the universalisation of primary education.” In 2005, however, the mood was not so positive, with teachers noting with disdain that many of these trainings, in the absence of faculty (that is, teacher trainers) in the DIETs, had turned into a “do it yourself” training exercise. The teachers also resisted being trained by people who were “untrained” (that is, did not have pre-service training), and whose academic leadership they were not willing to accept.¹²⁵ Clearly, this was an outcome of the pitched battles stemming from the larger

¹²³ Personal interview with Mr Brij Nandan Sharma, *Bihar Rajya Prathamik Shikshak Sangh*, Patna, 4 June 2007.

¹²⁴ This training effort of the BEP was widely noted in the national literature that emerged from DPEP. Viewed as a participatory process, the aim was improving the pedagogical skills of activity-based, child-centred, and joyful learning. The State Project Director for BEP M.M. Jha recalled participating in one such training exercise in the West Champaran DIET (in September, 1995), noting that it was a memorable experience (Source: M.M. Jha: *Evolution of Cluster Resource Centres as Institutions for Empowerment and School Effectiveness*, DPEP Calling, September 1997).

¹²⁵ These trainings were being conducted by DPEP, and the “trainers” referred to here were resource persons appointed by the reform team on short-term contracts. In the selection of these trainers, pre-service training was not a criterion (Personal interview with Mr Mahendra Prasad Singh, *Arajpatrit Shikshak Sangh*, Gaya district, Gaya, Bihar, 3 October 2005).

issue of unemployment in the state which was being fought outside of the policy arena—in the courts. The system therefore came to a grinding halt.

5.8 Conclusion: Diverging Paths to Teacher Policy Reforms

This chapter illustrates that interests and institutions are important factors in shaping the political dynamics of educational policy reform, but their role is not necessarily that of opposing change. In AP the political dynamics were characterised by a pragmatic strategy—one which separated teacher interests as individuals from union interests as a collective. The discretionary and arbitrary policies for the recruitment, transfer, and postings of teachers generated patronage opportunities, and found favour with vested interests. But this was opposed by teachers themselves, and formed an important reason why they had to rely on unions. Clearly, reducing discretion and rationalising policy entailed a loss of these patronage opportunities. But gains came from winning the support of teachers on a large scale—an outcome that was advantageous for the reform process. These are results that are not supported by a theory of politics that is formulated on the premise of material self-interest as being the core motivation for policy action.

In resolving individual teacher grievances, policy entrepreneurs in AP acted such that the state positioned itself as an ally of the teachers (and not of vested interest groups who were “winners” of prior contest over policy). In supporting the demands of the large unions, in AP the state played a political role, a partisan ally of unions—opposing some (the GTA) and supporting others (the PRTU and the AP-UTF). Under these circumstances, the unions were not left with the option of opposing reform. The unions too admitted that oppositional strategies did not give them the room to manoeuvre and gain concessions, which were important considerations if they were to sustain their appeal among their members. In their dealings with the government, the role of unions as “agents” of teachers placed a constraint on them to “cooperate” rather than to oppose.

Many elements of the political dynamics of union-government relations in the reform process were borne out in the case of Bihar as well. The unions preferred cooperation as opposed to confrontation with the state. But differences in structure and partisan affiliations were an important reason for a difference in the government’s

approach towards them. The weak unions present in Bihar meant that the state found no incentive in responding to their demands, and in fact opposed the unions for being aligned to the upper castes, and the opponent political party. The state in Bihar preferred a strategy of confrontation compared to the skills and negotiations witnessed in AP. This resulted in forced retreat, abandonment, and deadlock. However, even when things came to a standstill, the cause of this was not the “colonisation” or control of policies by the vested interests of teachers.

While policy entrepreneurs in both the states thought similarly about the need for teachers’ support in order for reform efforts to succeed, there was little convergence on this in the thought and action of political leaders and policy entrepreneurs in Bihar. Initially, there were efforts at consulting unions in the state, and the reform team consulted and even appointed teachers to work alongside; but these change efforts seemed to be singularly championed by policy entrepreneurs with little backing from the political leadership. As a result, the main direction of policy backed by political leaders took a turn very different from what could have been in the interest of reforms to succeed. In contrast, reform efforts in AP were characterised by convergence of actions of the political leaders and policy entrepreneurs.

Within AP, there was variation as to the extent to which unions were associated with reform on the ground. The AP-UTF in East Godavari was a pro-reform union; its local influence among teachers was a reason for enthusiasm towards the reform agenda. The teachers did not see the extra work required of them for school improvement as being a burden. The AP-UTF used its official position within the reform team and the resulting proximity to the district collector to put pressure on the DEO against arbitrary action as regards teachers. In Mahabubnagar, the PRTU and STU were not similarly associated with reform efforts on the ground. When compared to East Godavari, this district presented a picture of teacher apathy—with many complaints about teachers turning up late for afternoon classes, or leaving instructional activities on the shoulders of *vidya volunteers*. Gaps in leadership at the implementation level, caused due to vacancies in the post of MEOs in a few of the district’s *mandals* enhanced the comparative indifference of teachers towards schools.

Successful reform efforts have negotiated a convergence of teacher interests with the aims of reform. This is an element of strategy that change managers in both states are fully aware of. However, the operationalisation of this requires separate and specific measures by political leaders and policy entrepreneurs, which are differently aimed yet converging in vision. The former sends system-wide change messages of the state being interested in teachers and schools, while the policy entrepreneur works to rationalise policy and reduce elements of rent-seeking from both teachers and communities.

The new measures for decentralised recruitment of teachers in Bihar are the result of such convergent action and they display the use of skills and negotiation on the part of the government. But these measures have not eliminated the contest around teacher policies, as much as they have transferred the contest down to the local level. The new policies also entail a new set of responsibilities for state action. Whether these measures allow the harder process of change for schools to be put in place in Bihar, will be a crucial future test. It also needs to be examined whether two divergent roads to teacher policy reform, based on the contrasting policies of centralisation and decentralisation in AP and Bihar, and in other states within the Indian federal set-up, can lead to the achievement of the same goals.

Chapter 6

Reform Proponents:

The Role of Educational Decentralisation and Community Participation in Overcoming the Constraints to Change

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I evaluate policy optimism regarding the effectiveness of demand side interventions in overcoming the impediments posed by interests and institutions in the light of the experience of the implementation of such interventions—namely school decentralisation and community participation in Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Bihar. I include in the analysis of “demand side” interventions, changes made to formal rules in order to move school-related decisions to lower levels of government, and efforts to improve participation and accountability, especially by setting up new institutions in the form of school councils.¹²⁶ Although not the principal component of the reform process in terms of the resources allocated, these interventions were perceived as creating the changed conditions under which schools would operate, and they were among its most widely discussed aspects.¹²⁷ The federal guidelines for the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) (Government of India 1995) addressed the need to mobilise communities both through consultation and the establishment of Village Education Committees (VECs) with a view to “generating a demand for educational development”. The expectation was that a

¹²⁶My definition of “demand-side interventions” follows from that of Corrales (1999 pp. 28–33). He suggests that “bolstering the demand side” by measures such as information campaigns, the involvement of beneficiaries, community participation, and decentralisation are possible ways in which the political conditions for the adoption of reforms to improve the quality of education are likely to benefit.

¹²⁷The World Bank (2003b), which is a “review of educational progress and reform under DPEP”, notes that community mobilisation and village education committees as being “central” to the DPEP, and lists this as the first among the programmes major interventions reviewed by the report (Chapter 2, pp. 26-27). Other prominent reviews of the DPEP include Bashir and Ayyar (2001), and Pandey (2000), and both reiterate a similar notion of centrality of demand side efforts under DPEP.

more informed and empowered community would build societal pressure in support of educational reform—so countering the self-interested actions of small but powerful interest groups and institutions.

Various theoretical claims and practical policy considerations form the basis for this “policy optimism” regarding demand side interventions. Economists argue that these changes encourage public spending to be made on the basis of local priorities, and also close information gaps between the government and its citizens, allowing the latter to hold the former accountable. For political scientists, these changes hold the additional promise of stronger and more participatory democracy. For public administration specialists focusing on more practical considerations, there is the promise of improved “service delivery”, with an opportunity for citizens to demand better quality of provision.¹²⁸ Following from these expectations of improved governance and enhanced democratisation, countries around the world have adopted measures for school decentralisation and community participation, and donor agencies insist on some amount of community participation being made an integral part of educational reform. The literature, however, is also quick to caution about the need to differentiate the “promise” from the “practice”, and advise that the current faith of participation being a panacea may sometimes be unwarranted.¹²⁹

Given these observations about the need to differentiate rhetoric and theory from the actual experience of implementation, the objectives of this chapter are two: first, to examine how AP’s relative success in improving its primary schools, compared to Bihar, has been due to its achievements in educational decentralisation and community participation; and second, given empirical evidence from both the states, the chapter

¹²⁸See Grindle (2007 p. 6–8) for a discussion on the key arguments of economists, political scientists, and public administrators on the theoretical promise of decentralisation. In addition, the World Development Report (2004) *Making Services Work* (World Bank 2003a) provides the main arguments about improvements in service delivery by creating more short and direct routes of accountability between “clients” (i.e. community members) and “frontline providers” (i.e. teachers in the case of education). See Pritchett and Pande (2006 pp. 10–13) for an explanation of the relationships of accountability as they exist in the “service delivery framework” and its applicability to primary education in India.

¹²⁹Pritchett and Pande (2006 p. 20) make a reference of some of the recent international cases of decentralisation in education which have not worked well—namely the experience of Indonesia and Argentina. According to the authors, a lack of careful design was responsible for these failures. Banerjee, Banerji, Duflo, Glennerster, and Khemani (2008) caution against unwarranted optimism on participation on the basis of results of randomised evaluations conducted in Uttar Pradesh. Strategies for improving participation in village education councils in this state, leading to better oversight of schools, did not work. Channa (2011 p.34) also notes that decentralisation-oriented governance reforms did not have the desired outcomes in Pakistan.

attempts to scrutinise theoretical expectations regarding the contribution of greater participation and local control over school governance in overcoming the challenges posed by a centralised bureaucracy. Since educational decentralisation and increased community participation are not just an “input” for improving schools, but also an outcome of reform interventions, this comparison also serves to help understand the extent to which the objectives of participation and decentralisation have indeed been achieved.

The chapter has four sections. In the first, I analyse the federal policy context within which AP and Bihar adopted statutory measures for setting up school councils. I argue that two distinct sets of federal policies—for political decentralisation and administrative decentralisation in education—provided opportunities for state governments to adopt a variety of institutional measures. In the second section, I outline how AP and Bihar used this opportunity, given the specificities of context and leadership motivation in each state. This is done by comparing the technical design of school decentralisation, as outlined in the Andhra Pradesh School Education (Community Participation) Act, 1998, and the government of Bihar’s *Vidyalay Shiksha Samiti Adhiniyam*, 2000, respectively. Further, the technical design—the “formal rules” so to speak—are significant because they establish the criteria within which sub-national authorities act and participation takes place.¹³⁰ In this section, I discuss the context and motivations for change, and of whether the principal actors promoting these changes are politicians or policymakers. I argue that the timing, context, and motivation of leaders all have a crucial bearing on how the committees actually work.

In the third section, I assess the experience of implementation of school committees, especially their participatory character and functioning. And also their relationship with other institutions—vertically with the line department of education, and horizontally with *panchayats*, which further highlight some of the “real intentions” for adopting these measures. Based on information obtained from focus group discussions, this section provides insight on the discretionary behaviour of frontline officers, and on how the people for whom these institutions are meant actually perceive of these “demand side” interventions. This is important because research on policy implementation often notes the

¹³⁰Burki, Perry, and Dillinger (1999 p. 18) note that these rules are particularly germane in comprehending decentralisation, because decentralisation does not mean “sovereign sub-national governments”. These are reforms where the “rules of hierarchy in a centralised bureaucracy are replaced by a more limited set of constraints on the bureaucratic behaviour of sub-national actors”.

difference in enthusiasm for implementation between bureaucrats at the top, who are responsible for designing policies, and field staff below who are responsible for implementation. The literature also emphasises the importance of understanding what happens at the policy recipient level (Barrett 2004 pp. 249, 253, 256; O'Toole 2004 p. 312). This further justifies looking at aspects of implementation, and not just on features of design.

In the light of the experience from implementation, and for reasons of change in political leadership, the formal rules relating to school councils were amended in both AP and Bihar. I discuss these in the chapter's fourth section. I argue that the technical design (and redesign) process was politically contested in both the states. This offered opportunities for political leaders and policymakers to alter conflict equations in the process of school reform. In the chapter's final section, I analyse whether superior technical design, or the politically contested working of school committees, were determinants of outcomes—both for school reforms, and for achieving the objectives of decentralisation and participation.

The principal sources of data used here include state policy documents (1998–2011), interviews with policymakers and experts to help understand the process of technical design (and redesign) of rules, and focus group discussions with parents and school committee members in order to appreciate their experiences of implementation. A total of 26 focus group discussions, attended by 467 community members, were conducted during 2005–06. A consolidated community level report, recording responses on each of the themes, was generated for each focus group discussion (See Research Methods Appendix 1E for details of the procedure of selection of villages and the themes on which responses were elicited from community members during the discussions. Further, Appendix 5 provides a list of villages where discussions were held).

6.2 Federal Opportunities: Two Sources of Policy Impetus to Promote Decentralisation

Strategic Dichotomy: The Centre Prescribes Political Decentralisation, Promotes School Autonomy

Two distinct aspects of federal policy change form the context in which both AP and Bihar adopted the route of legislative authorisation to set up school councils. These were the constitutional amendments for political decentralisation, and the impetus from educational policy reform, which was somewhat distinct in origin even to begin with, and was widely adopted following the introduction of externally assisted educational reform programmes. The political impetus came from the 73rd and 74th amendments to the federal Constitution which made it mandatory for states to have an elected third-tier of governance—that is, the *panchayats*. Further, it was recommended that the responsibility for primary education should be devolved to the *panchayats*, meaning that powers and responsibilities with respect to primary schools should actually be moved downwards in the decision making hierarchy.¹³¹ However, the Centre did not specifically prescribe how this was to be done, leaving this as an opportunity for states to evolve and adopt their own specific design.

The second impetus came from educational policy reform—the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986, was the first to emphasise the need for “decentralisation and autonomy of educational institutions” and of giving “pre-eminence to people’s involvement” in the management of education (Ministry of Human Resource Development 1986 pp. 26–27). It was in this context that a committee on decentralised management of education was set up by the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) in 1993. This committee recommended the establishment of “Village Education Committees” in view of the fact that *panchayats* were likely to be “political bodies” and therefore incapable of taking on the task of school reform (Raina 2000 p. 8).¹³² The dilemma between the need to devolve powers downwards to a third tier, versus some autonomy from local political control for educational initiatives (by forming school councils) formed the backcloth for

¹³¹These two Amendments were enacted in 1992 and became operational a year later. See <http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/amend/amend73.htm> for details of the amendment Act.

¹³² The committee was set up under the chairmanship of Union Minister Veerappa Moily for the purpose of recommending the management framework for school education following the 73rd and 74th amendment to the Constitution, and is commonly referred to as the “Moily Committee Report”.

the contesting ideas wherein states charted their strategies for educational decentralisation and increased community participation.

In the research literature on this issue, experience from the cases of other countries too points towards a similar dichotomy between two strategies—“autonomous schools” versus “municipalisation”, within which the specific course of educational decentralisation has been charted out. Gershberg (2004 pp. 415–18) notes this to be the case even in Nicaragua, where school decentralisation programmes were adopted following a change of government in 1990. The Autonomous School Programme, 1993, recommended monthly fiscal transfers to schools and formation of school site councils, whereas the municipalisation programme recommended the transfer of some school administration responsibilities to lower levels of government. Both elements of policy were not implemented with equal enthusiasm—reforms related to the Autonomous School Programme were sustained as they became a part of the wider agenda of neo-liberal economic reforms, while municipalisation was “all but abandoned as a national reform by 1996”, even though both efforts had been started at nearly the same time (Gershberg 2004 p. 418).

States Use the Federal Opportunity to Evolve Distinct Strategies of Decentralisation

Additionally, in the case of India, state-level experience in implementing externally assisted school reform programmes prior to the launch of the DPEP, had promoted institutional models of school site councils and the idea of greater community participation. The two notable initiatives in this regard were the *Lok Jumbish* in Rajasthan and the Bihar Education Project (BEP). Further, both programmes had supported the exercise of some informal supervision by the community over teachers to ensure that they attended school regularly. However, these initiatives were limited to the geographical areas where these projects worked, and remained isolated interventions pushed by policy entrepreneurs in state-level reform teams and supported by donors, but not adopted by state governments. In fact, these formed a second set of contested ideas—between the state governments (specifically, its Department of Education) and the reform team, on whether or not to scale-up the experience gained from these externally assisted projects.

However, federal guidelines for the DPEP, followed by the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), tilted in favour of scaling up the experience from these earlier projects, and made it mandatory for states to have school-level community bodies. Under these two programmes, a very small grant of Rs 2,000 was given to these committees to be spent on school improvement.¹³³ Once again, the states were left free to adopt their own design. From the practice that emerged in various states, two different models could be seen—school councils as community bodies (as in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), and as user groups of parents (as in AP, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh) (see Mehendale 2010 p. 12).

So from these federal policy initiatives and the ensuing variety in state-level practice, the different sets of ideas about the appropriate strategy to be adopted can be clearly seen. The basic policy dilemma before the states was of how to implement the mandatory measures for political decentralisation, even while protecting the autonomy of schools. Besides, political decentralisation also produced fear among teachers that their services could be transferred to local bodies—so changing their status as “government servants”.¹³⁴ Political leaders and policymakers in AP and Bihar made their choices about the appropriate “technical design” from these contending ideas about institutionalising community participation and school autonomy.

6.3 The Design of School Committees: Contrasting Models of Decentralisation in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar

To a certain extent, the initiatives taken by AP and Bihar can be argued to have been similar, in that both states adopted the route of legislative authorisation for their school councils.¹³⁵ However, differences in leadership motivation, the wider context of policy implementation, and the envisaged relationship with *panchayats* as the institutions of

¹³³ Although the amount was small (approximately 50 \$US) it forced state governments to set up school-level community bodies. The money was to be spent jointly by the school authorities and the school councils.

¹³⁴ Pandey (2000 pp. 37–38) takes note of the apprehensions among teachers towards decentralisation, fears that had to be strategically managed by reform leaders through appointing union representatives on the state-level societies that managed the reform programme.

¹³⁵ The other possible routes are by administrative orders or “ordinance”. Both are perceived to be led by the executive branch of the government, i.e. a “ministry led” strategy. See Gershberg (1999) for a comparison of legislative versus-ministry led reform strategies in educational decentralisation.

political decentralisation, formed the basis for two contrasting models of educational decentralisation in AP and Bihar.

School Education Committees in Andhra Pradesh: A Political Model of Centralised Decentralisation

The Andhra Pradesh School Education (Community Participation) Act, 1998, was enacted by Chief Minister Chandra Babu Naidu as a part of his wider vision for economic development linked to liberalisation and globalisation. In this, the role of the state was visualised as that of a “facilitator and catalyst”, and no longer as a controller of the economy (Government of Andhra Pradesh 1999 p. 8). Reforms in education were integral to this vision outlined in the “Vision 2020 document”.¹³⁶ Here, the stated goal was of AP not just as a “literate society, but [as] a knowledge society”, capable of taking on the challenges of the 21st century. The governance changes in education would involve “participatory management by stakeholders”—this was the vision of community participation in the overall management of education. The SECs were therefore a “user-group” of stakeholders (in this case, parents), within this wider scheme of development. Further, these school committees were part of Naidu’s unique programme—the “*Janam Bhumii*” (literal meaning—land of one’s birth)—for rural development. This programme was based on the formation of stakeholder groups for each specific area of rural development—for example, watershed development, forest management, and water-use. The programme worked on direct interaction between government officials, political executives, and line departments on the one hand, and local people on the other. Every quarter, one specific area of development was the subject of focus. Further, its institutional mechanism at the community level was parallel to the *panchayats*, and in practice the involvement of *panchayat* members was discouraged. The programme was used by the ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) to strengthen its base at the local level.¹³⁷

In technical design, therefore, the SECs were under the control of the line Department of Education (DoE), and did not have any connection with the *panchayats* (see Table 6.1 for an elaboration on specific aspects of design, including powers and the vertical and horizontal relationships envisaged for SECs). Local level officials and teachers

¹³⁶ The Vision 2020 document was prepared by the global consulting firm McKinsey.

¹³⁷ See Vaddiraju (2001) for details of the *Janambhumi* programme.

were supportive of this model for political reasons—it protected them from control by *panchayats*. The line department exercised its supervision and influence over the school committees in formal and informal ways, but mainly through the control of the election process and careful selection of chairpersons. No real powers were given to these committees, and their expected role was mainly to support school enrolment drives, and to authorise expenditure of school development grants. Critical decisions were taken by the school headmaster, who acted as the “member-convenor” of the committee, and worked according to the instructions of the *Mandal* Education Officer (MEO). They were essentially weak committees, under firm central control, intended to serve political objectives of the “central” political leadership—weakening local politics in the form of *panchayats*, and identifying local development processes with the ruling political party.

Vidyalay Shiksha Samitis in Bihar: The Policy Entrepreneur’s Support for a Strong Model of School Decentralisation

The case of Bihar was different—there were significant differences of context between the two states, and Bihar had prior experience with village education committees. Unlike in AP, at the time of legislation of the *Vidyalay Shiksha Samiti* (VSS) Act, 2000 (and until the change of state government at the end of 2005) there was no broader plan for economic or social sector development in Bihar (see Chapter 4 for details). The VSS Act, 2000 was therefore an attempt on the part of “policy entrepreneurs”—the reform-minded bureaucrats, led by the then Education Secretary to the government—to provide a statutory status to “village committees”, with which the state had nearly a decade of experience under the BEP.¹³⁸ It was a case of what Gershberg calls—the “legislative cart being placed before the reform horse” in Nicaragua, where a legislative authorisation for the Autonomous School Programme came a decade after implementation on the ground.¹³⁹

The rationale for this legislation was identified by the state’s former secretary for education as its ability to counter the key constraint facing the state’s school system, which

¹³⁸Mr B.K. Sinha, officer of the Indian Administrative Service was the Government of Bihar’s Secretary for Education between January and November, 2000. The legislation was passed during his tenure.

¹³⁹Gershberg (2004 pp. 408, 415) observes that most countries first create legal and legislative frameworks and then implement changes. But the Nicaraguan “Autonomous School Programme” in the 1990s “put the reform cart before the legislative horse” as the law came nearly 10 years after implementation of changes began. In the case of Bihar, the VSS Act provided legislative authorisation following nearly a decade and a half of establishment of village education committees under BEP.

had its origins in prior government policies of nationalisation of the school sector. This process turned teachers into “government servants”, severing their links with the community and leaving them under the control of an educational bureaucracy of which they were at the lowest ladder. Further, teachers were left at the mercy of a very discretionary system of transfers which operated at the will of politicians and the bureaucracy. Strong village committees had the potential to counter some of these challenges.¹⁴⁰

Put in place after consultations with parents, members of civil society, and academics, the objective of the VSS Act was to “minimise the control of the bureaucracy of the state’s education department on schools and teachers, reconstitute people’s control over schools, and create a societal force which could fight for education”. The vision for the future was that of “school autonomy”, reversing the policies of centralisation adopted in Bihar in the 1980s.¹⁴¹

In terms of design, elections were to be held by the general assembly of all villagers—referred to as the “*aam sabha*”. The committees were given strong powers for supervision of teachers—their leave was to be approved by the committees, and absenteeism could invoke the recommendation of punitive action. Also, while VSS were protected from being overwhelmed by political *panchayats* (the provisions for independent elections and statutory status were intended to give them such a protection), they were also linked to them by statutory design, unlike the situation in AP (see table 6.1 for specific aspects of the design of VSS).

However, political support for the legislation was lacking. In a measure signalling political indifference (or even opposition to the Act), the Education Secretary (responsible for bringing about the VSS Act) was transferred within a year, even before the first round of elections for the committees could be held. Also, due to this unscheduled transfer, the vertical support structures for the VSS, envisaged to be set up at the district level, could not be established. In the absence of support from the political leadership in the state, the VSS was prone to weak implementation from the very beginning.

The comparative differences of context, motivations of leadership, as also the strategic choices about different features of design, are summarised in Table 6.1. These

¹⁴⁰Personal interview with Mr B.K. Sinha, New Delhi, 13 February 2008.

¹⁴¹Personal interview with Mr B.K. Sinha, New Delhi, 13 February 2008.

differences left their impact on the implementation process—this is reviewed in the next section.

Table 6.1: Comparative Features of School Education Committees in Andhra Pradesh and the *Vidyalay Shiksha Samiti* in Bihar

Context	Andhra Pradesh	Bihar
Overall development agenda in the state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Part of Chief Minister Naidu's overall development strategy of economic growth by liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation. – Part of the <i>Janam Bhumi</i> development programme, encouraging the formation of self-help groups in specific sectors of development. – No prior experience with school committees (unlike Bihar). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No link with broader development programme. – No vision for overall development existed in the state. – Political <i>panchayats</i> should not overwhelm the gains made by the BEP in community mobilisation. – Local vision of VSS as a pressure group to counter <i>panchayats</i>. – VSS originate from prior experience of VECs under the BEP.
Link with Political Decentralisation-Panchayats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Naidu weary of political decentralisation; school committees used to undercut the role of <i>panchayats</i>. – Unlike Bihar, the Education Department and reform team work together, and they are under the control of political leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Political leadership weary of <i>panchayats</i>, but not interested in schools or VSS. – The education reform team works alone—no support comes from the Education Department; political leaders are disinterested.
Link with Education policy	Abolish child labour, responsibility for compulsory education of children.	Reversing centralisation in state policies for school education, especially teachers.
Initiative	Political leader.	Policy entrepreneur.
Authorisation Process	Legislation.	Legislation.

Table 6.1 (continued)

Context	Andhra Pradesh	Bihar
Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Four-tier committee at the school, <i>panchayat</i>, <i>mandal</i>, and district level. In reality, only school committees work. – SECs are a single purpose committee of “users”—parents. – Elected by parents. – Reservation for disadvantaged social castes and minorities. – The post of chairperson is reserved for women; in reality, men (husbands) exercise these powers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Single-tier committee, exists only at the village level. – VSS- committee of users and non-users. – Elected by an <i>aam sabha</i> of all villagers. – Reservation for disadvantaged social castes. – Either the chairperson or the secretary has to be a woman; in reality, women are not allowed to speak.
Relationship with Other Institutional Actors a. State level— Department of Education b. Local level - Mandal/Block Department of Education c. <i>Gram panchayat</i>	<p>a. Fully involved in design and implementation.</p> <p>b. Strong formal and informal control—elections, functioning, expenditure, dispute resolution.</p> <p>c. No relationship with <i>panchayats</i>.</p>	<p>a. Involved in design; no control over implementation.</p> <p>c. Under a sub-committee of the <i>panchayat</i>.</p>
Expected Role/Powers	Weak role—no real power <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Enrolment and retention of children. – Funds only from the DPEP and SSA. 	Strong powers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Concrete powers of teacher supervision. – Funds only from the DPEP and SSA.

Sources: (i)Andhra Pradesh (School Education) Community Participation Act 1998, Government of Andhra Pradesh; (ii) “*VidyalayShikshaSamiti Act*”, 2000, Government of Bihar.

6.4 Implementation Experience: Voices of the Poor¹⁴²

In this section, I assess the experience of implementing school committees on the basis of focus group discussions with members of SECs and VSS (see Appendix 5 for a list of villages where FGDs were held). On each of the themes discussed, the responses from AP indicate a more uniform presence of the committees, and fewer grievances among the

¹⁴² I borrow the phrase from the title of Narayan and Petesch (eds) 2002. *Voices of The Poor From Many Lands*.

people. However, strong grievances against the non-responsiveness of the local state were expressed in Bihar.

AP: Regular Elections and Meetings, but the SECs do not have Effective Powers

Elections

Elections to the SECs were reported to have been held regularly under the supervision of the headmaster and the MEOs. There was no variation of this procedure in either of the districts, and neither were there complaints of arbitrary use of powers by government officials, or subversion of the election process. However, the elections did not seem like a procedure of parents exercising real choice, as members were “identified” in advance by local officials. Further, community members openly acknowledged the “support” of the TDP for these elections. These conclusions are drawn on the basis of responses from discussions with community members—I now cite some of these observations for each district.

East Godavari District: In Prathipadu *mandal*, village Kittamooripeta, the MEO “invited” those who were to be elected as members for the SEC, and parents cast votes in a ballot box. Chairperson Gudem Kannarao admitted that he was being supported by the TDP, and the *sarpanch*. In Peedipalem, the elections were held in the presence of the MEO and by parents “raising their hands”. TDP’s support for the election process was openly acknowledged. In Razule *mandal*’s Vegivariapalem village, committee members of the primary school in SS Colony reported that election of the members was “unanimous”. The *sarpanch* was instrumental in identifying members prior to the election. Also, this was the only FGD where committee members acknowledged support from the Congress Party in their selection. Villages Thattipakkamattam and Gandipuram also confirmed regular elections and support from the TDP.

Mahabubnagar District: In Jadcherla *mandal*, village Kodgal, elections were held by a show of hands, and the TDP had supported the elections here as well. The same procedure was followed in Pedda Adirala. The headmaster, MEO, and *sarpanch* were present for the

elections. The *sarpanch* was reported to have played a role in pre-selecting members of the SEC; members were elected unopposed as they had the support of the TDP.

In Dharur *mandal*, village Kothulagidda, votes were cast by parents in a ballot box and the MEO and the headmaster supervised the elections. The MEO reportedly identified the parents who could become members. In Turup-Tanda, the SEC members were invited by the *sarpanch*, and were elected by a show of hands. The TDP was once again said to have supported the elections.

Functioning

In its functioning too, there was a regularity of procedure in AP. Meetings were held regularly—once every month—although members did not participate regularly or speak actively on issues of concern when attending. Also, only routine matters were discussed and no major initiatives were taken up by the community as a result of these meetings. One of the expected powers to be exercised by the committee was the expenditure of the school development grant. However, in practice, the committee members had no idea where this money was going, and it was spent mainly on items decided by the headmaster or chairman. Also, they had little knowledge of how the contracts for the maintenance of school buildings and the construction of additional classrooms were being awarded. Although there were strong indications that these contracts were being awarded either to the chairman or his (or her) relatives, there no complaints arose about the possible misuse of funds.

I cite once again from the observations I have in this regard, from the focus group discussions:

East Godavari District: In Prathipadu *mandal's* village Peedipalem, committee meetings were reported to be held regularly, but members had no idea of either their role or what was discussed. Also, the chairman and the headmaster alone knew details of the expenditures made and the contracts awarded, not the committee members. In Gajjenpudi, the situation was the same—meetings had been held regularly, but there was no clarity of roles among committee members. In Venkatnagaram, members had no idea of when the meetings had been held, or what decisions had been taken. In Kittamooripetta, members reported that meetings had been held regularly, but they did not attend them. No significant

decisions were taken, and this was apparent when members said they discussed—“about children’s studies, about child labour, and about facilities”—in the meetings. They also had no idea of how the school development grant was spent. Guddem Kannarao, the chairperson, reported that he and the headmaster had “repaired the school building” for a contract of Rs 140,000.

In Razule *mandal*, members of the SEC for the cooperative school reported that very few meetings were held (for example, meetings were held on Independence Day merely as a token gesture), and only a few attended. Members also had no idea of their role, and reported that no funds had been given to them. In village Gandipuram too, members had no idea of when the meetings were held or what their role should be.

Mahabubnagar District: In Jadcherla *mandal*, Kodgal village, meetings were held regularly, but they did not attend regularly, nor “did they get a chance to speak” if they attended. While they were aware that the annual school development grant had been spent on buying furniture for the school, gifts for children, and as salary for a sweeper to clean the premises, they were unaware as to how the contracts for repairs to the school building were awarded. SEC member Raghupati Reddy said in this regard—“the chairman knows everything”.¹⁴³

In Pedda Adirala, committee meetings were held regularly, and issues of “regularity of teachers, and children’s study” were said to have been discussed. But the school development grant had been spent by the headmaster. The contract for construction of the school toilet had been awarded to someone related to the chairman—while the group refused to divulge any more on this issue, they admitted that the “chairman knew everything about it”. In Chinnapally village, members came for the meetings whenever they were called, but did not know of their role, nor were any major decisions taken in these meetings.

In Dharur *mandal*, Guvvaladine village, committee meetings were held every month, but members had no idea of their role. In Kothulagidda, members confirmed attending 6–8 meetings in the past year, where the issues of child labour and drop-out had been discussed. But they had no idea of what the school development grant was spent on;

¹⁴³Notes from focus group discussion, village Koddagal, JadcherlaMandal, Mahabubnagar, February 2006.

most felt that it was only the headmaster who knew about this. One committee member, Rangaswamy, had been given a contract to build toilets in the school. In Turup-Tanda, meetings were held once every three months, but members in the group had not participated in any. They had no idea of the role of the SEC or about the school development grants—it was the headmaster who took decisions in this regard, not the committee. They were also unaware of contracts for school construction.

On the basis of these responses relating to elections and functioning of SECs, I conclude that these committees were designed and implemented in order to serve political purposes—of distributing patronage through appointment to a “post” (that of the chairperson), and award of small contracts for school construction and maintenance. Participation of the community was neither intended, nor achieved.

Bihar: Elite Capture of the Election Process, VSS are not Deliberative Bodies of the Village Community

Elections

Even though the VSS Act of 2000 envisaged the election of village members in an *aam sabha*, in practice the communities in both complained that no such process had been followed. Further, block officials whose task it was to have supervised a fair election process, connived with the locally dominant to subvert the process. In this unfair process of “elections”, only those close to the *mukhiya* or the locally dominant became members of the VSS. The envisaged role of the VSS as deliberative bodies of the village communities could not be achieved.

Gaya District: Community members in both blocks complained that the election process was neither fair nor participatory. In Fatehpur block, no *aam sabha* was organised in villages Mayapur and Dhanchu. In other places, even if the *aam sabha* was held, there were complaints of local officers, *mukhiya*, and politically powerful people subverting the electoral process. In Dhanchu, block officials, the *mukhiya*, and a few villagers connived to “elect” all the members. Among those elected, there were many who did not live in the village. The *mukhiya*'s wife became the chairperson. In Aamin, residents of the village were not given any prior information about the venue and timing of the *aam sabha*; a few

people, favourably inclined towards the *mukhiya*, came and signed on the register and so legitimised the election process. Only those close to the *mukhiya* were “elected” to the VSS. When people got to know about the election, and reached the election site, there were physical clashes.

In Belaganj block, Hemant Bigha village, the *aam sabha* was once again in question—no officers were present, nor did all the villagers participate. Village Saraiya Harijan Tola-Bindaspur was an exception—here it was reported that the VSS had been elected by an *aam sabha* with no pressure of any kind. However, the working of the VSS in this village is such that the chairman, secretary, and the headmaster of the school connive to do whatever they like; the VSS is unable to deliberate or take any decisions on issues relating to the school.

Purnia District: In this district, complaints regarding the electoral process seemed less severe—the *aam sabha* was reported to have been held in most places, but the process of domination of elections by powerful locals was affirmed even here. In village Bareta, Kasba block, only those considered close to the chairman were elected as members. In Sonapur, Baysi block, only those amenable to the *mukhiya* and the secretary were nominated. So in Bihar the process of domination of the election process is very evident. Further, these being “village committees” (and not user committees of parents, as in AP), they mirror the power structures of villages—that is, the dominant castes have their way. Even in cases where the electoral process seemed to have been conducted in a fair fashion, the working style nevertheless reflected local power structures.

This has an impact on the provision of special representation for socially disadvantaged castes and women. Nominations are manipulated in such a way that the representation of these groups is neither real nor effective. Women members were selected largely for reasons of proximity to the *mukhiya*, or because they were related to him. In a number of cases, members were illiterate women who did not have their own voice on the committee, and did what was dictated to them. In Amin and Mayapur, both in Fatehpur block of Gaya district, the women and Scheduled Caste members selected were considered to be very “weak” candidates—they could not sign their names, and were incapable of raising issues on their own initiative. In the same block, in Dhanchu women and SC members were “selected” by the *mukhiya* and the headmaster. Often women members did

not know what their role in the VSS should be. Thus, their participation was unlikely to be effective.

Functioning

In Bihar, the meetings of the VSS were held infrequently or not at all. And some of the important powers given to these committees by statutory authorisation, especially the power of supervision over teachers, were not being exercised. Therefore, even though in theory the devolution of powers to the committees made it seem like a somewhat stronger model of decentralisation, in practice this is not the case.

Gaya District: In Fatehpur block, Mayapur village community members said that they were not consulted, and all decisions were taken by the chairperson and the headmaster. The last meeting of the VSS was held more than three months previously. At that meeting, when members asserted their right to be consulted, a situation of violent confrontation arose. In Dhanchu, the VSS has hardly ever met; when it did, members found it difficult to raise issues because the *mukhiya* did not let anybody speak. It was claimed he even threatened several members who tried to speak. In Aamin village, the VSS had never met. Therefore, it had had no influence on either the teachers or the school.

In Belaganj block, village Hemant Bigha, the chairman denied the request of the members to hold a meeting. It was interesting to note the functioning of the VSS in Saraiya Harijan Tola-Bindaspur. While the villagers reported that the process of elections had been fair, the functioning of the committee was not participatory. The chairman and the secretary did whatever they liked, without taking the committee members in confidence. Villagers were angry with these two functionaries, and complained that the entire system had collapsed.

Purnia District: In Baysi block, village Bajardih, meetings were held irregularly. The secretary dominated the VSS, and did not inform either the chairman or the villagers about its meetings. In Purana Ganj, a backward caste woman member of the VSS came to meet

us after the focus group discussions and reported that people were afraid to speak out due to fear of those who dominated the VSS.¹⁴⁴

The committees did not emerge as collective bodies of village communities, capable of deliberating on their behalf, articulating their demands about schooling, and countervailing political power; rather, they were usually dominated by the chairman, secretary, *mukhiya*, and the local officers. When the officers, *mukhiya*, local notables, and officers acted collectively, they were able to exclude community participation and voice—leaving no avenue for the airing of popular grievances. Moreover, when these dominant actors worked at cross-purposes, the working of committees came to a standstill. For example, in the village of Mayapur in Gaya district, the chairman and the secretary were opposed to each other. Therefore, hardly any business was done—because the chairperson refused to call meetings.

Although complaints about shortages of teachers, absenteeism, and irregular timings were the most important issues raised by villagers, the VSS invariably made no effective use of the statutory powers given to it in this regard. Indeed, the perception is so strong that teachers are part of the local structure of power, that even though villagers complained about them, they did not exercise the powers conferred on them under the VSS Act. There is a feeling that VSS post-holders, local education bureaucracy, and teachers are collectively a part of the local power structure, and that therefore, complaints from poor people will not be heard.

AP: SECs have no Links with Panchayats, Strong Control of the Education Department

The design of SECs in AP had envisaged no links with *panchayats*, and that is how these bodies existed on the ground—one among the many parallel forms of user groups, intended to undercut the power of *panchayats*. In reality, the *sarpanch* had greater local power than the school committees, and very often he influenced the selection of committee members. No funds or powers were transferred by the *gram panchayat* to the education

¹⁴⁴This lady member of the VSS suggested that only if the research team were to meet the poor people by themselves, would they get a real picture. Poor people like her will never speak because of a fear of the group.

committees. Therefore the SECs remained “official bodies” outside the control of *panchayats*. Also, the SECs did not have any relationship with the other user groups. This reinforced their status as isolated bodies with no horizontal links. However, the Education Department’s control on the committees was strong.

Bihar: Powerful Panchayats Control VSS, No Links with the Education Department

In Bihar, although it had been envisaged that the VSS would have a degree of autonomy from both the *panchayats* and the *mukhiya*, in reality the situation was different—the *mukhiya* dominated. It was mostly candidates supported by him who were “elected” to the committees. Block level officers often worked alongside locally dominant individuals, including the *mukhiya*, and denied poor people their right to complain about subversion of the electoral process, and irregularities in the working of government schools. There was no oversight by the state department of education. So, the VSS were officially abandoned institutions.

Major Issues and Grievances

Nothing brought out the contrast in local context in which school committees, and indeed schools themselves, operated in the two states more than people’s responses regarding what they felt were the major issues and grievances with respect to the working of schools. The difference was stark—with the school system appearing to be virtually non-functional in Bihar. Indeed, the malpractices and irregularities associated with school meal provision came close to constituting a denial of children’s basic rights. To highlight this contrast, in this section I reverse the order in which I present observations for the two states—discussing the “voices” from Bihar first.

Bihar: Irregularity and Absenteeism of Teachers, Poor Quality of Mid-day Meals

There were two major issues on which communities expressed their grievances—those relating to their regularity and absenteeism of teachers, and the unsatisfactory working of

mid-day meals (MDMs). I present some of the complaints of people on each of these issues, as recorded during focus group discussions.

I. *Irregularity and Absenteeism of Teachers*

Gaya District:

The school has a female teacher, who does not come to school every day. On the days that she does, she arrives between 12 noon and 2 pm. The children come to school every-day, but since they see the school closed, they return home. Parents once confronted the teacher about this issue, but since she is a powerful woman, nothing could be done. In fact, the teacher went to the local police station and lodged a “first information report” on the basis of which two of the parents were arrested. On another occasion, the VSS exercised its powers of teacher supervision, and sent an “absentee certificate” to the BEO. However, the teacher was only suspended for one month, and she was then reinstated because of her political clout (Notes from focus group discussion in Mayapur village).

The headmaster almost never comes to the school. Whenever he does come, he demonstrates his power in the school. He says he is busy with official work, and then leaves the school. The teachers are also irregular in their attendance. Some come once every three or four days, the others are more regular, but even they do not reach school on time—arriving anywhere between 11.00 am and 2.00 pm. The villagers are very angry with this (Notes from focus group discussion in Saraiya HarijanTola-Bindaspur village).

The school in this village is almost always closed.¹⁴⁵ The teachers come probably once in a month, and then go back home after doing some work. *Panchayat Shiksha Mitras* (para-teachers on contract) have been appointed in the school and they come from the neighbouring village. But even they do not come to work regularly. Because of this, the villagers have hired a *maulavi* (that is, a Muslim cleric) who charges Rs20 per student, but at least the children learn something. We have also tried sending our children to the neighbouring village school in Marawa village. However, the situation is similar there. The school does not open regularly; teachers are employed on government duties other than teaching, and the para-teachers come only to mark their attendance. The VSS is unable to exercise its powers and control the teachers, as they are “agents” of the village officers and the *mukhiya*. Whenever we complain to the BEO, our complaint is dismissed. Also, reaching our village is difficult. As a result, no one ever comes to supervise things (Notes from focus group discussion in Majlispur village).

Purnia District:

The situation in this district appeared very similar to what was found in Gaya. In village Sonapur, Baysi block, the community complained that the school had two teachers—but only in name. The head teacher was busy with election work, and the second teacher did

¹⁴⁵ I visited the school at 1.00 pm, when there should have been maximum attendance at the MDM. However, I found the school locked (visit to primary school SaraiyaHarijanTola in Bindaspur village, Belaganj block).

not come to school. Consequently, the meal programme had to close. “How could they supervise a teacher who was away on election duty?” villagers asked—meaning that the powers given to the VSS could not actually be exercised. Meanwhile, children had to be taught through private arrangements. In village Bareta in Kasba block, two teachers had been appointed to teach nearly 400 children. It was said:

The head-teacher does not teach, and the second teacher is a para-teacher who has to teach all of the children. The head-teacher creates problems during the admission of children. He does not enrol them in any other month except January. He also charges us Rs10 for every new admission (Notes from focus group discussion in Bareta village).

The complaints made about the irregularity and poor quality of school meals in Bihar completed the picture of severe neglect by the state of its own poor people. Indeed, political apathy towards schools and the poor created conditions for local vested interests to flourish. Teachers became agents of power, of “vested interests” in this local context, rather than because of their capacity to wage collective action, enhanced by the policies of centralisation.

Although they have little bearing on what the direction of educational policy reform should have been, in these narratives the “school” became a site of contested politics—meals that rightfully belonged to the children of poor people were being siphoned off to serve vested interests, while teachers and local state officials looked the other way. I noted little variation between the two districts. And the grievances were equally intense in both.

II. *Poor Quality of Mid-day Meals*

Gaya District:

In village of Dhanchu, the *mukhiya* and the headmaster acted in concert. The meals were irregular and of poor quality, and some very subtle ways were used to deny children a real meal. Thus I recorded:

The children get MDM only five to seven days in a month, and even on these days, they do not get a full meal. They are served only one or two spoons full of food, and then they are asked to leave. The *daai* (that is, maid-servant) to cook the mid-day meal has been appointed by the *mukhiya*—he took advice from no one regarding this matter. And, further, it depends on the headmaster when the meals will be cooked; and the headmaster also discriminates in the distribution of food. Some children are

given more food, but some may not receive any food (Notes from focus group discussion in Dhanchu village, Fatehpur block).

In Saraiya Harijan Tola Belaganj block, at the time of my visit the MDM had last been provided about two months before. The villagers also found that the teachers had enrolled the names of “non-existent” children—primarily to obtain their quota of grain supplied by the government. When parents confronted the teachers on this issue, they were told that this was being done on the instructions of the headmaster—one more instance of the headmaster demonstrating his “power” over poor people. In village Majlispur, the secretary of the VSS, Zohra Khatun, met us after the group discussions were over. She told us that meals had never been cooked in this school. The rice that was supplied for this purpose was sold off, and the money distributed amongst VSS members.¹⁴⁶

Purnia District:

The complaints were even more intense in this district. In Sonapur (where the headmaster was away on election duty), the last time a meal was served in the school was three months earlier. The villagers complained that when meals were given in the past, the children did not get enough to eat. In Bajardih, the rice and pulses were of such poor quality, that there was a smell of rot the moment these were cooked. Complaints were lodged with the secretary of the VSS and the *mukhiya*. But neither was able to do anything to improve the situation.

The strongest grievances, however, came from discussions held in the Kasba block. In Nimatol, the quality of the food served was extremely poor, whereas in Bareta and Tinpania, no school meal had been cooked in three months. Further, in Nimatol the VSS supervised the meals, yet found it difficult to improve its quality:

The quality of the rice is poor—insects crawl around in it. Children fall sick after eating the *khichadi* (a mixture of cooked rice and lentil). Many parents feel that either the quality of the food should be improved or the meal should be stopped altogether (Notes from focus group discussion in Nimatol village).

¹⁴⁶ Discussions with Zohra Khatun, Secretary Vidyalay ShikshaSamiti, Majlispur, block Belaganj, District Gaya, Bihar. 28 September 2005.

In Bareta, there were charges of corruption relating to the supply of rice. The chairman and the villagers brought this to the attention of the district administration. As a result, a “first information report” was filed for police action, and the Additional District Magistrate was reported to have visited the village. Nevertheless, no administrative action had been taken, and things stood unchanged. Such encounters with the local state leave people with a sense of hopelessness.

Fewer Grievances in Andhra Pradesh

The problems articulated by villagers in both districts of AP were far less severe. The grievances were mostly about the need for more physical infrastructure—rooms, toilets, drinking water—and for greater funds and power to be devolved to committees. In East Godavari, there were no complaints regarding teacher irregularity or absence, although there were some in this regard in Mahabubnagar district. There were also no complaints in either district about the quality or irregularity of school meals—complaints that had been so forcefully articulated by communities in both districts of Bihar.

In Dharur *mandal* of Mahabubnagar district some criticisms were expressed about teachers being irregular in their attendance at school in villages Guvvaladine and Kothulgudda. “When one teacher comes, the other one does not”, was the complaint in Guvvaladine, whereas in Kothulgudda community members felt that both teachers and MDMs were irregular—and that their grievances were not heard. In Jadcherla *mandal* too there were complaints about teachers being irregular at Chinnapally school.

The two states compared

Table 6.2 provides a summary of community perceptions with respect to the functioning of school committees. In AP, the SECs were uniformly present, although they had no real role. The chairman dominated the committee, had partisan affiliation with the ruling party, and was often awarded small contracts for school construction or repair. The community had a limited role in using the school development grants. But these grants were spent by the headmaster, and the committee merely authorised decisions that had already been taken. The committee played no role as a user group; effectively, it functioned as a “node”

for the strengthening of central control. Although in their design, the SECs in AP seemed akin to a model of “administrative decentralisation”, the gains in implementation were actually more political.

In Bihar, the VSS was envisaged as a “village” body and not a user group consisting only of parents. It was expected that the VSS would mobilise the community on an agenda of public interest—namely, school education. However, due to local struggles and domination, this did not happen. The election process was subverted. The local administration supported dominant individuals in the village and did not hear complaints from the poor. Weak vertical support from the state level DoE and administration meant that VSS were ineffective bodies.

Bihar also illustrates the significance of local contextual factors in shaping how “democratisation, accountability of local officials, and participation are encouraged or discouraged” (Grindle 2007 p. 3). There is indeed a “shortfall” of government at the local level, as can be seen in the many grievances expressed.

Photo 6.1: A School Building constructed by the *Vidyalay Shiksha Samiti*, Belaganj, Gaya, Bihar



Table 6.2: Community Perceptions regarding the Working of School Education Committees/*Vidyalay Shiksha Samitis* in AP and Bihar, 2005–06

Dimension	Andhra Pradesh	Bihar
Participatory Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Strong. – Elections held regularly. – Election process supervised by MEOs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Weak. – <i>Aam sabha</i> not held for election of members. – Election process dominated by block education officials, <i>mukhiya</i>.
Special Representation		
a. Gender	a. Women are members and they participate in meetings; but reservations for women to the post of chairperson are not effective.	a. Weak and ineffective representation; women have no voice.
b. Social Caste	b. Socially disadvantaged castes and minorities represented, but have no real voice.	b. Weak and ineffective representation; nominations are manipulated by <i>mukhiya</i> /chairperson.
Functioning		
a. Meetings	a. Regular meetings.	a. Infrequent or no meetings.
b. Decision-making process	b. No domination, but the headmaster and chairman take decisions. <i>MEO</i> controls the decision making process.	b. Dominated by chairperson, secretary, head teacher.
c. Contribution to functioning of schools	c. None authorised decisions already taken.	c. None.
Relationship with Panchayats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No relation with <i>panchayats</i>. – Exists as parallel centre of power to <i>panchayats</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Mukhiya</i> dominates the election process and functioning. – Unable to challenge the political powers of <i>panchayats</i>.
Relationship with the Government— Department of Education		
a. State level	a. Strong control of state level officers.	a. No relationship with the state level DoE.
b. Local level	b. Strong control of <i>mandal</i> level officers.	b. Discretionary action by block-level officers.

Table 6.2 (continued)		
Dimension	Andhra Pradesh	Bihar
Compliance with Design Envisaged in the Act	Strong.	Very weak.
Grievances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Few—mainly about improving infrastructure facilities in schools. - No complaint about mid-day meals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers not regular in attendance. - Powers for monitoring them cannot be exercised in reality. - Poor quality and irregular provision of mid-day meals.
Comments on Political Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chairpersons are dominant; considered to be local workers of the TDP. - SEC members acknowledge affiliation with TDP. - Seen as a direct initiative of the political leader—Chandra Babu Naidu. - Undercuts the authority of other political actors—MLAs, opposition party members, <i>panchayat</i> head. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chairpersons are dominant, but they are not affiliated to any particular political party. - VSS members affiliated to the locally dominant. - Indifference, even apathy of state level political leadership. - Local political MLAs and other political parties have no interest.

6.5 Changes to Design and Strategy, 2006–09

Sharp Reversals in AP, but the Basic Design Persists in Bihar

The politically contested nature of the institution of school decentralisation was evident from the changes made to the formal design, that is, the rules within which participation was to take place, by the new governments that came to power in 2004–05. In these elections, incumbent governments were defeated—a government led by the Congress Party replaced the TDP-led government in AP; and in Bihar the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) government was replaced by a coalition government of the Janata Dal-United (JD-U) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). While the core strategies of central control in AP and local control in Bihar persisted, the design changes were significant only in AP.

Andhra Pradesh

The 2004 elections in AP saw a sharp reversal in electoral fortunes, as the Congress Party led by Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy won a majority in the Assembly (185 seats for the Congress Party compared to only 47 seats for the TDP in a total of 294 seats). Since the SECs were widely noted to be partisan in character—especially as their chairpersons were viewed as local leaders and workers for the TDP—changes were expected. As the SECs completed their term in 2005, the new Congress government held elections for new committees in abeyance for over a year, and then issued guidelines incorporating changes in design in 2006.¹⁴⁷ In making these changes, the government did not go through a process of legislative authorisation. Instead, it made use of its powers of decree through an ordinance. The two major modifications made were that the SEC should be a nominated body, and that the visible role of the chairpersons in the SECs should be subordinated. Further, cabinet ministers were given the power to nominate members. The position of “chairperson” (earlier selected for partisan affiliation to the ruling TDP) was now given to the *sarpanch* of the *gram panchayat*, who was to be its ex-officio head. These two changes signalled a new style of rule by a “different political party” (that is, the Congress Party), in place of the “personalised” style of rule by Naidu.¹⁴⁸ There was a redistribution of local power involving *gram panchayats*, and also in the nature of control from above (exercised through the minister). However, the model remained one of centralised decentralisation.

Bihar

In Bihar too a new coalition government led by the JD-U came to power in October 2005—elected on a promise of reform in governance.¹⁴⁹ Improving primary schools was high on its agenda. And the two key steps that the new government took in this regard included appointing a reform minded administrator to lead its DoE and setting up a

¹⁴⁷Government of Andhra Pradesh (2006) Andhra Pradesh School Education Management Committee (Community Participation) Rules 1998.GO Ms.No.95.

¹⁴⁸ The new government made a regional distribution of responsibility among cabinet ministers, making them responsible for looking after the development programmes of particular districts. This was an informal distribution of power, because the ministers were formally responsible for their “portfolio”—i.e. the government departments of which they were head. The district ministers-in-charge were to nominate four members to the school committee.

¹⁴⁹ Two rounds of elections were held in 2005, in February and October, and the coalition of BJP and JD-U won 147 out of a total of 243 seats in the Bihar Legislative Assembly.

commission to examine all aspects of change needed in schools.¹⁵⁰ These two measures signalled a convergence between the political leadership and policy entrepreneurs in Bihar, similar to what I have observed to be the case in the initiatives taken for teacher policy reform in AP (see Chapter 5). In its report, the commission affirmed the basic philosophy behind decentralisation and noted that the VSS were trying to “return to the community what the government had taken away in the 1970s and 1980s” (Government of Bihar 2007a p 18).

Basic design features of the school committees persisted. And there was also an augmentation of the safeguards required to maintain their autonomy. A new legislation recognised complaints about the irregular attendance of teachers in school, and the capture of school committees by powerful groups, as subjects requiring immediate attention. Several steps were taken towards establishing a process of free and fair elections for the VSS. First, the Election Commission—a statutory body entrusted with the conduct of elections for the state legislature—was given the responsibility of overseeing elections to VSS (Government of Bihar 2009 p. 6). Second, the earlier process of “election” in the *aam sabha* was replaced by secret ballot of an electorate consisting of parents.¹⁵¹ While I have noted observations about the local state being non-responsive to the needs of poor people, now the block level education officers were accountable for holding fair elections, and investigating complaints against the chairperson or secretary of the VSS. Also, while the overall superintendence of the *panchayats* was retained, many of the discretionary and informal ways in which *mukhiyas* controlled the bodies, were blocked by detailed rules of procedure (Government of Bihar 2009, and see also Table 6.3).

¹⁵⁰ The government appointed the Common School System Commission in 2006 to recommend measures to provide quality education for children, with a special focus on equality of opportunity and social justice. The new Education Secretary of the government, Mr M.M. Jha also served as a secretary to this commission (GoB 2007a pp. Annexure I, p ii-iii).

¹⁵¹ The Act of 2007 referred to parents as constituting the “electoral-college” for the VSS, whereas the detailed rules issued by the government in 2009 added an extra condition—namely that only parents whose children had over 40 per cent attendance at school were eligible to vote (GoB 2009 p. 6).

Table 6.3: Recent Changes to School Education Committees in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2006–09

	Andhra Pradesh	Bihar
Year>>	2006–07	2007–09
Context	Change of government in 2004.	Change of government in 2005.
Motivation	Political affiliation of earlier SECs with the Telugu Desam Party.	Weak implementation of earlier legislation.
Authorisation Process	Ordinance.*	Legislation.*
Dimensions of Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Nomination of members in place of their election. – Ministers get a chance to control nominations. – <i>Sarpanch of gram panchayat</i> to be ex-officio chairperson. – SECs become “School Education and Management Committees”. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Strengthens the process of election by providing detailed rules of procedure, including preparation of electoral rolls and voting by secret ballot. – Election Commission to supervise elections. – Mainly parents are to be the members. – Procedure for inquiry about complaints against chairperson, secretary, and members. – Specifies relationship with local government—BEOs to supervise election process and to inquire into grievances. – Specifies relationship with local government—safeguards against domination of VSS, yet power of superintendence with <i>gram panchayat</i>.

Sources: (i) GoAP 2006, 2007 (ii) GoB 2007b, 2009.

Notes: (i) SEC—School Education Committee in Andhra Pradesh; GP—Gram Panchayat; VSS—VidyalayShikshaSamiti in Bihar.
(ii) *These are two different ways in which the government makes laws in India. A “legislation” is an act passed by both houses of the state/central legislature, and approved by the Governor of the state/President of India. An ordinance is a temporary measure, a law or legal order issued by the government when the houses or legislatures are not in session. An ordinance must be ratified within six months of its promulgation.

The two states compared

The main motivation for change in AP was the political affiliation of the SECs with the TDP and its leader Chandra Babu Naidu, while in Bihar it was political indifference resulting in weak implementation. The changes in design abandoned the process of holding elections in AP, while in Bihar it was the process of holding elections that was strengthened. The changes also reflected an alteration in political style, following changes of government in both states. In AP there a political message was conveyed—signalling a “distribution” of power with other party leaders, and heads of *gram panchayats*. This contrasted with Naidu’s previous central control over all policy and political processes. In Bihar, the new focus on governance was meant to distinguish Chief Minister Nitish Kumar’s different approach compared to the earlier rule of Lalu Prasad. In different ways, both states were signalling a move away from the populist and personalised rule of the earlier political leader. Augmenting the fairness of the election process in Bihar was also an attempt by the government to reach out to people—thus bridging a “trust deficit”. Therefore, in both the states, the changes conveyed a political message.

In many ways, the changes made to the VSS in Bihar following the 2007 Act made these committees similar to what the former SECs looked like under Chief Minister Chandra Babu Naidu in AP. By this I mean committees dominated by parents and under the responsibility of the government’s Education Department. But two basic differences persisted in the Bihar committees: first, they never became “user committees” that undercut the powers of the *panchayats*, as had been the case under Naidu. Second, they were given powers of monitoring the presence of teachers—a role which was never given to the committees in AP. The changes also signified a strong local contest around schools in Bihar, compared to a more centrally-controlled process in AP.

6.6 Conclusion

In both AP and Bihar, the technical design and the redesign process—and that of implementation—of school councils, have been deeply contested in political terms. This observation highlights the initial remarks I have made in this thesis that the process of educational reform is not simply about the unfolding of a technical plan. Even though decentralisation and community participation seem to have contributed little to school outcomes in either state, the efforts of technical design and redesign have been seen as political opportunities in both. In the first instance, the committees were designed by adapting federal opportunities, and strategic choices made about balancing political decentralisation with demands of educational policy. However, the redesign process in 2005–06 was meant to send clear signals of a new style of political leadership in both the states, and to reaffirm the distribution of patronage to new local actors in AP.

That technical design alone is not a guarantee of success is further underscored by the failure of VSS in Bihar. Of far greater significance for outcomes is the need for support from the political leadership, and the presence of an overall agenda of development. In the context of pursuing an agenda of neo-liberal economic policies, even symbolic measures such as the SEC were implemented effectively and showcased as a part of reforms. The lack of a development agenda in Bihar resulted in political indifference. These conclusions highlight how differences in context, and the motivations of the leadership, lead to divergent outcomes for demand-side interventions

The experience of AP suggests that the legislative process had a sense of a “final outcome”—that is, central control of the state’s Education Department and partisan affiliation with the ruling party. There was also an imprint of the “centralist” style of Chandra Babu Naidu in his attempts to undercut the power of *panchayats*. This was because the SECs were modelled like user committees in other sectors of development. The process of redesign initiated by the new Chief Minister of the Congress-led

government altered this style more than anything. It sought to “redistribute” the gains of central control—sharing them with other ministers and *panchayat* leaders. But it did not make any change to the basic strategy of central control over school committees. There were no moves towards greater school autonomy or the devolution of powers over schools downwards to *panchayats* despite the change in political regime. The state remained on the list of “weak decentralisers” (Manor 2003b).

Since the basic design did not envisage any real devolution of power to committees, or involvement of the community in decisions related to schools, there was little evidence that AP’s somewhat better outcomes as regards schooling were because of its achievements with respect to “demand side” interventions.

On the other hand, superior technical design and stronger powers for the school committees also had little impact on outcomes in Bihar. This was because elite capture of the committees, and weak support from the state government’s DoE, made them very weak bodies. Bihar also highlights the need for institutional support to come from the top for decentralisation measures to be effective.

The comparison of the two states also throws some light on the research question of which actors matter most in the policy reform process. While the policy entrepreneur acted alone in Bihar, the political leader exerted control over the process of change in AP. The policymaker alone was neither able to institutionalise change, nor signal an ethos of decentralisation to lower levels of the implementing administration.

These observations from the experiences of AP and Bihar also form the basis for suggesting modifications to the expectations of political economy theory regarding the role of “demand side” interventions in countervailing the power of teacher unions. In Bihar, reversing the policies of centralisation and local control over teachers was an explicit element of the design of VSS. Yet the committees did not achieve their intended objectives—not because of opposition from “strong” teacher unions, but rather because

of the control and domination of local powerful interests. Uniformly, the narrative from the voices of the poor was one of denial, and of the local state colluding with dominant individuals. In such circumstances, the poor felt there was no way in which to be heard.

The indifferent outcomes of decentralisation and community participation also provide an indication of the unfinished agenda of school reform. The ideal vision of autonomous school councils, on whom powers and resources for school management have been adequately devolved, is a long way off. However, more than two decades of federal and state initiatives have been successful in institutionalising the idea of having local bodies associated with the school reform process. Both states considered here are once again in the process of redesigning their school committees in order to bring them in conformity with new federal guidelines of the Right to Education Act, 2009. Now, all states are to have school management committees consisting largely of parents. This is a case of “federal adoption” of the model that exists in AP (and also Karnataka). This development, and the wider role now envisaged for school committees, as in Bihar, is an example of educational reform in the states forming constituent elements of a “federal design”. This is also an instance of legislation following over a decade of reform in the states—although this time at the federal level.

Chapter 7

Politics, Schools, and the Poor: A Local View

The objective of this chapter is two-fold: first, assessing the results of the implementation of macro-level reforms at the local level, looking in particular at variation between districts in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh and also at variations between these states. The second objective is analyzing local level political factors that contribute to these differences. In particular, the chapter examines how the technical design of particular reform initiatives are “reinvented” or “adapted” at the local level through interaction and struggle between the school, communities, and political actors. Hence, the chapter examines the relationship between reform and politics in a new (third) arena, characterised by the interaction between local interests, institutions, and the state in determining reform outcomes.

Based on extensive field work in rural areas of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, the chapter compares the differences in reform “results”, as indicated by school participation, the working of schools and teachers, and the implementation of the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) programme. It also discusses the factors associated with these differences as obtained from community perceptions of the functioning of the education system, and through an analysis of the functioning of local institutions.

The chapter uses data from two research methods: (i) a quantitative survey of households and schools in selected districts of each state, and (ii) qualitative information from school observations and interviews with parents, teachers, political actors, and administrators. Data was collected from two districts each in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar during 2005–06, with one district being “educationally advanced” (that is, with literacy rates higher than the state average) and the second being “educationally backward” (that

is, with literacy rates lower than the state average). The selection of two contrasting districts within each state facilitated an analysis of local level differences. Hence, East Godavari in AP and Gaya in Bihar were selected as “educationally advanced” districts, and Mahabubnagar in Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Purnia in Bihar were selected as “educationally backward” districts.

This chapter has five main sections. The next outlines the methodology of data collection and analysis. Sections two and three present an analysis of the “results on the ground” of the reforms in terms of student participation, and provision of inputs for the education process. Section two presents data from a household survey on participation in elementary education, disaggregated by social categories of caste, religion, and gender. It compares the districts in each state and also the districts across the two states. This is complemented by observation data on attendance on the day of the school visit. Section three compares the availability of physical infrastructure, the presence and adequacy of teachers, and implementation of incentive schemes for promoting school participation, specifically the MDM programme in the two states. This is done through a school survey and observations during field visits, particularly about the type of interaction that the teachers have with students, and community experiences. The next section analyses the role of local politics in the functioning of schools. It focuses on the role of the local state, organised interests, and local political actors. The concluding section summarises what school reforms, implemented for over a decade, have actually provided to the poor and explores why reform implementation in AP differs from that in Bihar, with a focus on the role that local politics plays in determining these differences.

7.1 Methodology of Data Collection

Sample Selection

Information was collected from a survey of schools and households, school observations, and interviews with teachers, political representatives, and government officers; field notes on school observations, including discussions with parents in selected field sites in the two states also formed part of this exercise. The selected field

sites were eight sub-district units in the two states, selected after a 2-stage sampling process. In the first stage, two districts were selected in each state. In the second stage two sub-districts units were selected from within these two districts, giving a total of four sub-district units in each state. The districts were selected on the basis of contrasting educational indicators—literacy rates that were higher and lower than the state average.¹⁵² The two sub-districts within each district were also purposely selected on the basis of better/worse literacy rates. Within each sub-district, 10 schools were selected at random using the list of primary schools available with the District Education Office (DEO). In each school, 10 households were chosen for a survey, giving a total of 100 households per sub-district unit. Hence, 40 schools and 400 households were surveyed within each state. Annexure Table A7.1 illustrates the selection process and Annexure Table A7.2 gives details of the sample.

These findings are not statistically “representative” of the situation at the state level; they are more representative of the situation in selected districts.¹⁵³ The real significance of the findings of the survey is the insight it provides into how reforms was implemented on the ground, and how children, teachers, and parents experienced it. Second, the selection of districts based on literacy rates enables an investigation of the local factors that are responsible for better or poor educational performance, given similar support in terms of resources and policies from the higher levels of the government.

Data Collection Instruments

The instruments used for data collection were: (i) a household questionnaire, with questions on school participation of children, functioning of the school, role of teachers and regularity of children attending school, and the role of education committees and *panchayats* in improving schools. This questionnaire was administered through face-to-

¹⁵² All districts in these two states were divided into three clusters—districts with literacy rates higher than the state average, close to the average, and lower than the average. Selected districts are from the top and bottom clusters.

¹⁵³ At best they represent an average of the situation in two districts in each state, one district with good educational indicators and the other with poor educational indicators.

face interviews preferably with female heads of households, (ii) a school survey questionnaire, with questions on school infrastructure and facilities, attendance of children, and teacher availability and quality. This was administered in schools through face-to-face interviews with the teachers present, (iii) interview guides for discussion with teachers, block/*mandal* education officers, and political representatives, and (iv) open-ended interviews with parents, teachers, political representatives of *panchayats*, and government officers.¹⁵⁴ School observations were recorded as field notes.

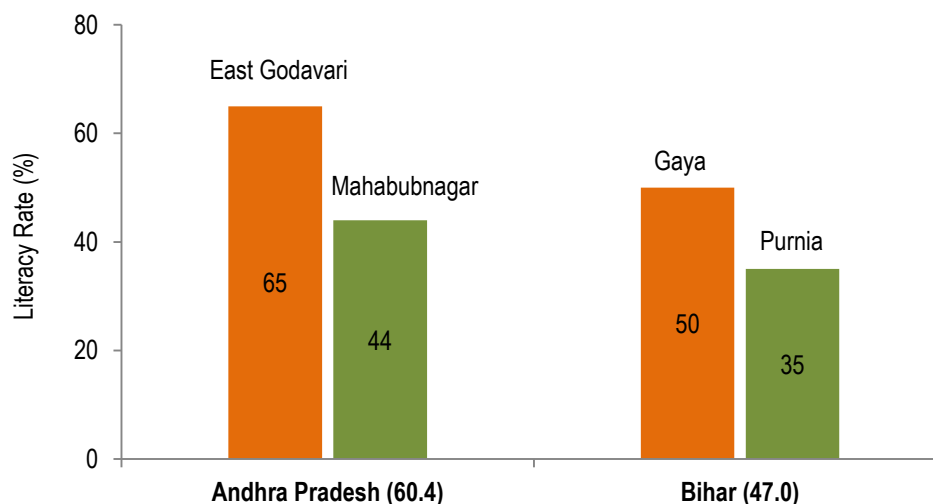
Characteristics of the Sample

The high literacy districts selected were East Godavari in AP and Gaya in Bihar; the low literacy districts were Mahabubnagar and Purnia in AP and Bihar respectively. Literacy rates as per the 2001 Census are given in Figure 7.1. Clearly, although both districts in Bihar had lower literacy rates than their comparators in AP, the difference in literacy rates between districts in each state was roughly similar. This is important because it allows us to look for differences in the implementation of “state-level” reform initiatives in widely differing local contexts.

Annexure Tables A7.3 to A7.5 summarise some salient features of the sampled households and indicate the social context of each sub-district unit.

¹⁵⁴ See Research Methods Appendix (Appendix 1 Section D) for details.

Figure 7.1: Comparison of Literacy Rates for Total Population in Survey Districts of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2001



Source: Census of India 2001

Social Profile of the Households Surveyed

Understanding the social profile of the surveyed community, mainly in terms of its social-caste composition, is an important starting point for discussion of school participation.

Andhra Pradesh

Over half of the sample households in Andhra Pradesh (53.4 per cent) belonged to Other Backward Castes (OBCs). The second highest concentration was that of Scheduled Castes (SCs) (22 per cent) who are at the lowest levels of the caste hierarchy. The concentration of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the sample was also high at 15.4 per cent. Keeping in mind the fact that as per the 2001 Census the proportionate share of STs in the total population of AP was only 6.60 per cent, their proportionate share in the sample was 2.3 times higher than their share in the total population of the state. In fact, the

proportionate share of all three deprived social groups—OBCs, STs, and SCs—in the survey was higher than the estimates available for their share in the population, indicating a fair inclination of the sample towards deprived social-caste categories (see Annexure Table A7.3).¹⁵⁵

Within the state, there was noticeable variation in social-caste proportions across the selected districts. Mahabubnagar had a very high concentration of OBCs; at 60.6 per cent this was nearly one and a half times more than their proportion in East Godavari. Mahabubnagar also had a higher proportion of SC households (25.8 per cent) as compared to East Godavari (18.6 per cent) (Annexure Table A7.3).

Bihar

In Bihar too, OBCs had the highest share in the sampled households (45.7 per cent). But the comparative situation for the two other deprived social groups was quite different. The share of SCs in the sample was very high at 40.3 per cent and almost equal to the share of OBCs. Second, the proportion of ST households in the sample was very small as the state was left with a very negligible population of STs (0.90 per cent) after its bifurcation and the creation of the new state of Jharkhand in 2000.

Within Bihar, variations between the selected districts were not much. The two districts had very similar proportions of the OBC population—47 per cent in Gaya and 45 per cent in Purnia. Gaya had a slightly higher SC population as compared to Purnia, and the latter district also had a higher proportion of the upper caste population (Annexure Table A7.3).

¹⁵⁵The share of Scheduled Castes in the total population of Andhra Pradesh was reported to be 16.20 per cent in the 2001 Census. In the surveyed areas the estimated population was higher by 6 percentage points than the Census figures. Backward Caste population was not counted in the Census, but research sources (Srinivasulu 2002 p. 4) report their share in AP's population to be 47 per cent.

The two states compared

In all the four selected districts in the two states, Mahabubnagar had the highest proportion of OBCs, East Godavari of STs, and Gaya of SCs. In terms of religion, the overwhelming majority were Hindu in AP (close to or above 90 per cent of the households), and in Gaya (91 per cent of the households). Purnia was an exception, as only 45 per cent of the households surveyed were Hindu, and over half the households (55.5 per cent) were Muslim. East Godavari was the only district in the two states with a small Christian population—9 per cent (Annexure Table A7.4).

Children of School Going Age

The demographic profile of the sample, viewed in terms of the distribution of child population by age group, reflected an important difference between the two states. New entrants to the Bihar population—children in the 0–4 years age group (18.7 per cent) were nearly twice the number in Andhra Pradesh (9.9 per cent). The implication of this is that there will be a much larger number of school going children in Bihar in the future.

In both the states the highest proportion of children was in the primary school going age group (6–10 years), indicating that the school system in both the states was dealing with its most severe challenge at the time of the survey. In Bihar, the average number of children per family was higher (3.62) as compared to AP (2.26). In both the states, districts with better educational indicators reported fewer numbers of children per family on average (see Annexure Table A7.5).

7.2 Results on the Ground: School Participation and Attendance

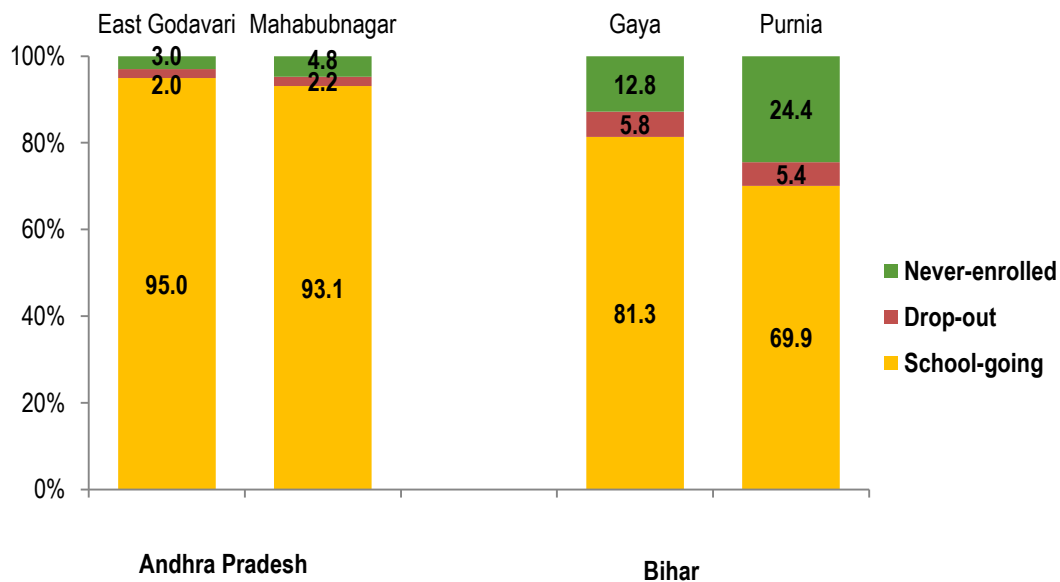
Household Reports on School Participation

School participation (as reported by the households in the survey) and school attendance (as measured by the number of students counted present on the day of the field visit as a percentage of those marked present by the teachers) were used as indicators to judge the results on the ground. The justification for this method is that while the former indicates

from the households' point of view whether they access the service that the state is supposed to provide, the latter shows both the actual utilisation of the service and the extent to which there is mis-reporting and hence, indirectly, potential for diversion of resources.

School participation was broken down by two age groups: 6–10 year olds who represented children eligible for primary school, and 6–13 year olds who represented children eligible for elementary school. As education reform was specifically supposed to improve participation of the underprivileged, school participation was reported specifically for girls, SCs, STs, OBCs, and also by religion. To supplement the picture on current school participation, data was also collected on those who had dropped-out and those who had never enrolled in school, which gave a more complete picture of service access in the past. Figures 7.2 and 7.3 highlight the differences in school participation between districts within a state in the primary and elementary school age groups respectively.

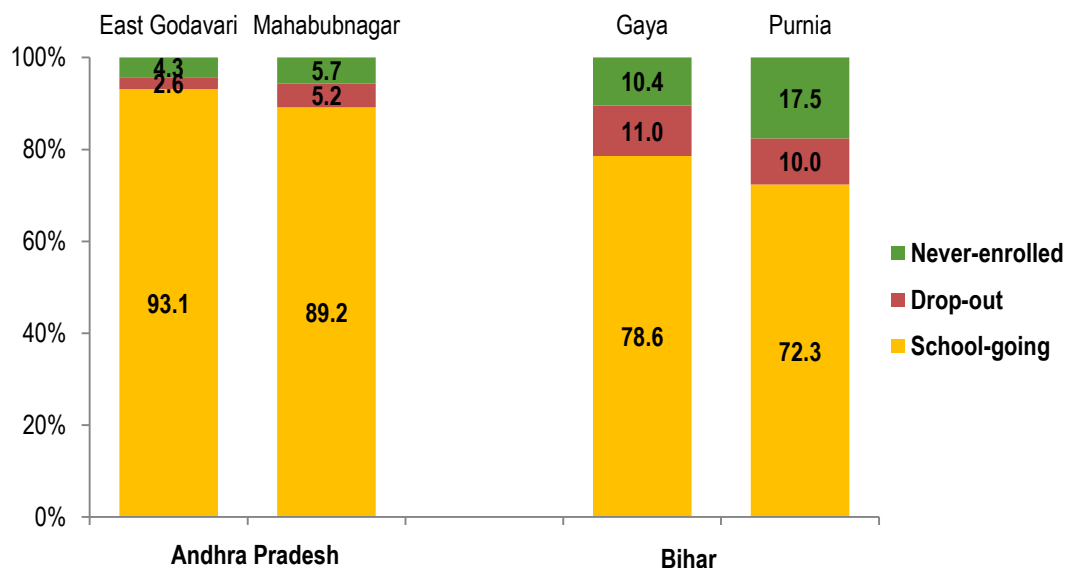
Figure 7.2: Percentage Distribution of Children (6 to 10 years) by Status of School-going, Drop-out and Never-enrolled



Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005-06.

Note: "School-going refers to children currently attending school; 'Drop-out' refers to children who were enrolled and attended school but currently are not attending school; 'Never-enrolled' refers to those who have never been enrolled in a school. All three refer to children in the age-group 6-10 years who should be attending primary grades I-V.

Figure 7.3: Percentage Distribution of Children (6 to 13 years) by Status of School-going, Drop-out and Never-enrolled



Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005-06.

Note: "School-going refers to children currently attending school; 'Drop-out' refers to children who were enrolled and attended school but currently are not attending school; 'Never-enrolled' refers to those who have never been enrolled in a school. All three refer to children in the age-group 6-13 years who should be attending primary

Andhra Pradesh

In Andhra Pradesh, the participation of primary age children (6–10 year olds) was high in both districts—95 percent in East Godavari and 93 percent in Mahabubnagar (Figure 7.2). Equally impressive, the participation of 6–13 year olds was also high—93 per cent and 89 per cent respectively (Figure 7.3). The small difference between the districts is noteworthy given the fact that there was a 21 point difference in literacy rates of the same districts just five years ago (2001 Census). The narrow difference in the performance of districts was confirmed by participation rates for girls, SCs, and STs. First, within each district, there was not much difference in the participation rates for these groups. For instance, there was a less than 5 per cent difference between the participation rates of all children aged 6–13 years, and SC children of the same age in East Godavari; this differential was even lower (3 per cent) in Mahabubnagar, the low literacy district. Second, the difference in participation rates of different social groups in

the districts was also not large. For instance, the participation rate of SC children aged 6–13 years was 88 per cent in East Godavari and 85 per cent in Mahabubnagar. Finally, the percentage of children in both age groups who had never attended school was 5 per cent or less in both districts, a remarkable testimony of the success of the reform efforts in the state.

Bihar

The picture was different in Bihar. To begin with, the participation rate of children aged 6–10 years (the youngest cohort) in both districts was significantly lower than that in AP. Compared to the low literacy district of AP (Mahabubnagar), there was a 10 percentage point difference with Gaya (district with high literacy rates) and an almost 25 percentage point difference with Purnia (district with low literacy rates). Between Gaya and Purnia, there was an 11 percentage point difference, compared to a 2 percentage point difference between selected districts of AP (Figure 7.2). Surprisingly, this difference between districts in Bihar did not seem so large for the age group of 6–13 year olds, with a 79 per cent participation rate reported in Gaya and a 72 per cent participation rate reported in Purnia (Figure 7.3).

Even more striking was the percentage of children aged 6–10 years who had never attended school in the two districts of Bihar. Almost one-quarter of the children in Purnia and one-eighth in Gaya had never been to school, an equally remarkable testimony of the failure of the implementation of reform efforts in Bihar.

Gender Differences in School Participation

A disaggregated view of participation in terms of social categories of gender and caste provided a more insightful view of who came to school and who got left behind. In terms of gender, the situation in AP was better than in Bihar, as the overall participation rates were higher and the participation rate for girls was only marginally lower than that for boys. Table 7.1 shows that on average, the gender differential¹⁵⁶ was close to one

¹⁵⁶See the “Notes” for Table 7.1.

(0.98) in AP, indicating very little difference in the proportion of boys and girls attending school. Girls' participation rates in Mahabubnagar were 5 percentage points lower than in East Godavari.

In Bihar, the overall participation rates were lower, and gender differentials were higher (0.93), indicating a much lower participation of girls in comparison to boys in schools. On average, participation rates for girls in Bihar were 18 percentage points lower than what they were in AP. The inter-district variations in participation rates for girls were similar to that in AP. Participation rates for girls in Purnia were lower than that in Gaya by 5 percentage points (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: School Participation Rates (%) by Gender, District Level

State/ Districts	Boys	Girls	Gender differential*
East Godavari	93.8	92.4	0.98
Mahabubnagar	90.3	87.6	0.97
Andhra Pradesh	91.9	89.9	0.98
Gaya	81.4	75.4	0.93
Purnia	75.1	69.8	0.93
Bihar	78.0	72.4	0.93

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Notes:

- (i) Gender differential was calculated by dividing the participation rate for girls by the participation rate for boys. The closer the value of the differential (reported in column 3) to unity (1), the less the differential.
- (ii) School participation is for children in the age group 6–13 years.

Caste status reinforced gender differences in both states, with the highest differentials among SCs. In AP, the differential was 0.90 while in Bihar it was 0.86, indicating a higher gender disparity in Bihar. Further, at 63.3 per cent, the participation of SC girls in Bihar schools was lower by almost 21 percentage points as compared to the participation rates of upper caste girls in the state (84.2 per cent). At 82.1 per cent, the participation rates for SC girls in AP were about 19 percentage points higher than that for SC girls in Bihar, and similar to the participation rates of upper caste girls in Bihar.

In a sense even the worst off social categories in AP reported school participation rates that were comparable to or better than privileged upper caste groups in Bihar (see Annexure Table A7.7).

There was parity in participation of upper caste boys and girls in both the states (a gender differential of 1 or more). The situation was the same for girls from backward castes in AP; their participation in schools was equal to that of boys. Unlike AP, participation rates for girls from backward castes in Bihar were not equal to that for boys, but the disparity was lower (gender differential of 0.96 for OBCs in Bihar).

Social-Caste Differences in School Participation

In both states, the lowest participation was reported among SCs and STs, although STs had a significant population only in AP and not in Bihar.

AP's better performance, as compared to Bihar, was on account of both higher participation by upper and backward castes, and because even the most disadvantaged social groups, the SCs and STs, performed better than comparable social groups in Bihar. This was illustrated by the higher school participation rates reported in East Godavari. The district's success was based on the fact that its large backward caste population had a near universal participation rate of 95 per cent, and universal participation rate for upper caste children. The STs in the district did not do as well, and at 84.3 per cent, they had the lowest participation rates among all the social castes. Yet they did very well as compared to the disadvantaged social castes in Bihar. In Gaya, the comparable district selected in Bihar (better literacy rates), participation rates for the most disadvantaged social group, the SCs, was 72.5 per cent or nearly 12 percentage points lower than that for STs in East Godavari (see Annexure Table A7.8).

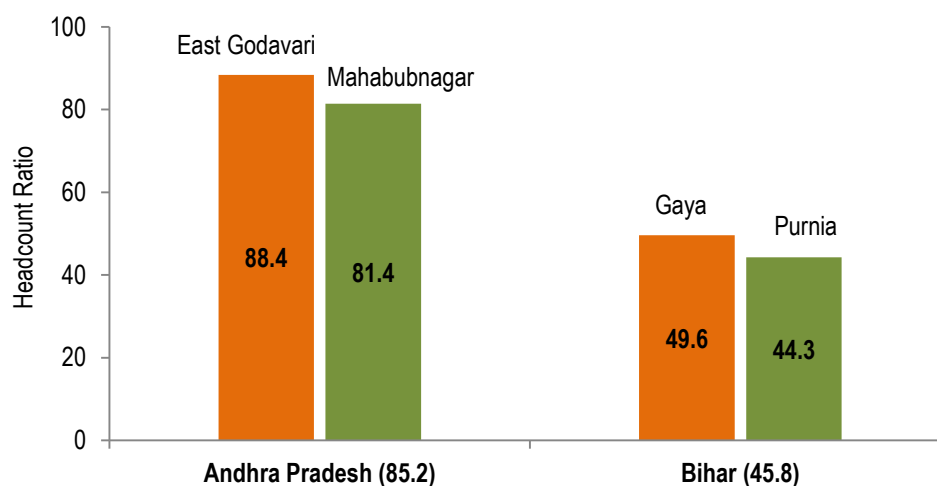
In all four districts surveyed in the two states, the worst performing social group was SCs in Purnia. At 65.3 per cent, their participation rates were approximately 7 percentage points lower than those for SCs in Gaya, and 19 percentage point lower than those for STs in East Godavari, the worst performing group in AP (Annexure Table A7.8).

Religion based differences were not as important as those based on caste. In both states the participation rates for Muslim children were equal to or only slightly lower than for Hindu children. In Purnia, the only district with a Muslim majority population, Muslim children reported better participation rates than SCs. In AP, only Mahabubnagar had a small Muslim population (9 per cent), and the participation rate of their children were only marginally lower than that for Hindu children (Annexure Table A7.9).

Low Attendance in Schools

Finally, there was a striking difference between the two states in terms of the children actually present on the day of the field visit expressed as a percentage of those marked present by the teachers. In AP, this was 88 per cent in East Godavari and 81 per cent in Mahabubnagar. In Bihar, the figures were 49 per cent in Gaya and 44 per cent in Purnia (Figure 7.4). Over half the children marked present were not in school in both districts in the state. The issue of lower actual presence of children in Mahabubnagar in AP, and in both districts of Bihar was taken up with school teachers during the field visit. Some of this qualitative information is now analysed.

Figure 7.4 : Actual Presence (%) of Students in Schools in Survey Districts



Source: School Survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005-06.

Notes: Headcount Ratio: Headcount of actual presence of students as a percentage of children marked present by teachers on the day of the school visit

Andhra Pradesh

Inter-district variations in school attendance were high in the state—7 per cent (Figure 7.4). This was striking in view of the low variations in school participation rates reported in the two districts in the state (2 per cent for the 6–10 year age group). In East Godavari, I came across very few instances of schools with low attendance. In Prathipadu *mandal* many teachers felt that the good relations between the school and community members built over the last few years were responsible for an increase in attendance. The *Mandal Parishad* primary school Gajjenpudi in this *mandal*, was a very vibrant one where children came on time, attendance was high, and many parents were around to help with small jobs in the school. The teachers considered the former chairman of the School Education Committee, Sacchi Narayan as its main pillar of support. He had mobilised the community and had helped in resolving school related issues at the level of the community.

Another important factor behind the Gajjenpudi school working well was the strong vigilance by ultra-left groups belonging to the Communist Party of India-Maoist-Leninist (CPI-ML).¹⁵⁷ The village *sarpanch* was affiliated to the CPI-ML, and his son Gopi confirmed that the group took a keen interest in the functioning of the school: “We resolve all the problems at the community level, and do not allow any interference from outside, especially the police.” According to him, only 60 to 70 children were not attending school due to hardships faced by their families on account of a severe drought.

The Girijan primary school, Bappanadara (Prathipadu *mandal*), located in the dense forests of Rampachodavaram, and attended mostly by the Kondadora tribes, was also being monitored by CPI-ML, cadres of which had chopped off the nose of School Education Committee (SEC) member Chintalnokkaraju because of suspicions of pilferage of school supplies (Photo 7.1). This had sent a strong message to the

¹⁵⁷Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist People’s War Group was active in this area. Usually known as the People’s War Group, the party believes in the use of violence for overthrowing state power and renounces electoral politics.

government administration as well as the community to keep vested interests away from the school. Children attended school because it worked well.



7.1: Bappanadara School in East Godavari: Chintalnokkarju's nose was chopped off by CPI-ML cadres (Photo by Mansi Midha)

In Mahabubnagar, attendance was low in many schools, especially after lunch. In the Musapet primary school, I found empty classrooms (see Photo 7.5). Five teachers were present, but there were no children. The teachers gave many reasons for why children were not in school: children from the backward and scheduled castes had gone to the nearby residential hostel where lunch was being served for them, and they had not come back.¹⁵⁸ After waiting for over an hour, I was told that some children had gone fishing after lunch, while some others had gone to a fair in the local market. I also visited the fair, but found no children there.

¹⁵⁸ Andhra Pradesh had an extensive network of hostels set up by the government for backward caste and scheduled caste children. Lunch for these children was provided by their hostels and not in the schools.

The Musapet school was a combined Telugu and Urdu medium school, with specific teachers appointed to teach in Urdu. But there were no students learning Urdu. For the empty classroom in the Urdu section, I was given the reason that *Muharram*, the Muslim day of mourning, had been observed a week ago. Since then the Muslim students (who were enrolled to study in the Urdu section), had not come back to school in full strength.

When the issue of low attendance was taken up with the local *sarpanch* of Musapet, A. Bhaskar Goud, the researcher was told that poor people were not very keen on sending their children to government schools.¹⁵⁹ Anybody with any means to educate their children preferred private schools as they did not have confidence in the government system. In many other schools in Mahabubnagar, a local *jatra* of the deities was cited as the most common reason for low attendance. In the Nallikonda primary school, children had gone home after lunch. However, within minutes of my reaching the school a message was sent to the village and the children came back.

Often the teachers hid the real reasons why children were not coming to school, for example, because of drought and migration. The area had witnessed a severe drought over the last few years that had forced people to migrate. This was an important reason for explaining why schooling of children had been disrupted. Sheeresya, parent of a child in primary school Sankalmati, articulated this issue when he said that “migration is a huge problem as there has been a drought in the district for the last seven years. Families have had to migrate under pressure.”¹⁶⁰

Admitting a drought in the area had implications on the official machinery—of the state being unable to serve its poor citizens—and the teachers, therefore, refrained from making any statements that could have possible negative implications on the working of the government.

¹⁵⁹Personal interview with Mr A. Bhaskar Goud *sarpanch* Musapet, Addakal *mandal*, Mahabubnagar, 14 February 2006.

¹⁶⁰Personal interview, Sheeresya, Primary School Sankalmati, Mahabubnagar, 14 February 2006.

Bihar

In Bihar, attendance was poor in both districts, and inter-district variations (5 percentage points) were lower than the variations in school participation (11 percentage point difference in school participation for 6–10 year olds). Local festivals and weddings in the village were frequently cited as reasons for low attendance. A village wedding also meant that the school was shut down for a few days as the functions were held in the school.¹⁶¹ In many schools, teachers refused to show attendance records. In Fatehpur (Gaya), a lady teacher had torn off pages from the school register meant for marking attendance. In Purnia's Gotphar school (Baysi block), the attendance registers were locked. The teacher came to the school after many requests, especially from local notables, and then the attendance records were shown to me. Many teachers in Gaya told the researcher in confidence that higher attendance records were maintained so that more grain could be picked up and more allowances taken from the government for school meals. The teachers also claimed that a number of children came to school at lunch time to eat the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) and did not attend classes. But none of the reasons given by the teachers could explain why only half (or less) of those marked present were actually attending schools.

In both the districts in Bihar, there was a distrust of the state among parents, and very little hope that anything would be done as there was an abysmally low presence of the state in the local context.¹⁶² In the absence of state machinery, schools were operating under strong constraints from local vested interests. Such an uneasy relationship between the school and the community would hardly render the school a place where young children in need of care could be left behind.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Schools were used as a “board and lodge” facility for the bridegroom’s family and friends.

¹⁶² This “sighting” of the local state confirms the findings of Corbridge, Williams, Srivastav, and Veron (2005 pp.33–35) of “scarcity” of the local state in states of eastern India—Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal. This observation was based on the poor performance of the state in the anti-poverty, employment assurance, and primary education programmes, as viewed from the perspective of its beneficiaries.

¹⁶³ The survey also asked households to respond to reasons for lack of enthusiasm in sending children to school. There was a very low response to this question in Gaya. In other places, households cited “lack of interest”, “nobody to monitor (children’s education) at home”, and “nobody to monitor in school” as important reasons.

7.3 Results on the Ground: School Infrastructure, Teachers, and the Mid-Day Meal Programme

Access to Schools and Physical Infrastructure

When it comes to issues of access to schools and the physical infrastructure available, field visits showed that official data often made claims that did not exist on the ground in Bihar. The contrasting experience of reaching schools in Baysi block in Purnia and Dharur *mandal* in Mahabubnagar illustrates this. Both were educationally backward with only a quarter of their populations being literate (2001 Census; Annexure Table A7.2). Yet, reaching schools in these two areas, and seeing how they functioned, was not the same experience.

Getting to the primary school in Gotphar in Baysi block was an uphill task. Even though officially the school was reachable as it had a *kuccha* approach road, I walked for over an hour from the main road and still did not find any *kuccha* road. The path was intersected frequently by open drains for diverting rain water. Walking bare feet in the soft, muddy slush was the only option for reaching the school. On reaching Gotphar the researcher found the school closed. According to the villagers the teacher had not come to the school for over a month and the meal programme had been non-functional for over four months. In many other schools in Purnia and Gaya, teachers complained about how difficult it was to reach the schools because there were no roads or transport, a situation which worsened in the rainy season.

Reaching schools in Dharur was not so difficult, as the roads were in good condition and the timing of public transport buses had been synchronised with school timings. Like Dharur, commuting to the remote *mandals* of Gattu and Ieeja in the same district was also not difficult. Ieeja had a female *Mandal* Education Officer (MEO), Mariamma, for whom moving around in the field and visiting schools was not a difficult task.

Distance of Schools from Village and Availability of Roads

Andhra Pradesh

Villagers had better access to schools in Andhra Pradesh because approximately 77 per cent of the schools surveyed were within a kilometre radius of the village. Inter-district variations in school availability (within a kilometre of a village) were not large, indicating uniformity in provision by the state. Better availability of roads made access to schools easier—100 per cent of the schools in East Godavari and 90 per cent in Mahabubnagar were connected to *pucca* or semi-*pucca* roads (Annexure Table A7.11). A systematic effort had been made in the state to pool resources from different central and state government schemes and discretionary grants available with the legislators to build and maintain roads. Since schools were mostly within walking distance of villages, better roads were an advantage for teachers and education officers responsible for school supervision and support. MRPs, whose job it was to provide academic supervision in the field, were present in many schools at the time of the researcher's visit; very often they were seen cycling to reach the school.

An important difference between the two districts was in the number of new schools opened (in the last 10 years)—15 per cent in East Godavari and 5 per cent in Mahabubnagar. The district reform team informed me that the slow pace of construction in the latter district was not due to lack of funds from the state, but mainly due to bottlenecks in decision making at the district level (Annexure Table A7.11)¹⁶⁴.

Bihar

In Bihar only 50 per cent of the surveyed schools were within a kilometre of the villages that they served. Hence, small children had to walk longer distances to reach school. Gaya (higher literacy rate district) had a lower proportion of schools within a kilometre

¹⁶⁴ Personal interview with Mr Rajeshwar, Assistant Programme Coordinator, *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, Mahabubnagar, 28 February 2006.

of the village (40 per cent), than the lower literacy district of Purnia (60 per cent). This indicated that low participation or attendance in schools in Bihar was not completely on account of the distance of the school from the village.

Greater distances, along with poor roads made the situation difficult for both students and teachers. Only 55 per cent of the surveyed schools in Bihar had access to *pucca* or semi-*pucca* roads, whereas in AP the corresponding figure was 95 per cent. There were no inter-district variations in schools having access to roads, and only 55 per cent of the schools in both the districts were connected to *pucca* or semi-*pucca* roads (see Annexure Table A7.11).

Using a cycle to reach the school seemed impossible in Bihar. The condition of the roads was poor and travelling even a few kilometres by car could take hours. Not surprising that I did not find any Block Education Officers (BEOs) in the field during the survey.

People in Bihar did not perceive distance of the school to be a major problem—only 15 per cent of the households cited this as a problem in the survey. Lack of infrastructure and teaching staff, incompetence and irregularity of teachers, and lack of monitoring by BEOs and Education Committees were seen as bigger problems by the community (Annexure Table A7.19).

Poor Quality of Physical Infrastructure in Schools

Andhra Pradesh

The quality of school buildings left a lot to be desired in both the states, although schools in AP were somewhat better than those in Bihar in terms of the availability of specific facilities. Nearly 82 per cent of the schools had *pucca* buildings, though the maintenance was not very good. On average, schools in AP had three rooms and 90 per cent of these rooms were in a usable condition. Nearly 85 per cent of the schools found having verandahs in front of the classrooms, but most of these were used as classrooms due to lack of enough space to hold classes. There was not much difference between

districts in terms of quality or extent of utilisation (number of children per room) of physical infrastructure (Figure 7.5A; Annexure Table A7.12). More than 70 per cent of the schools reported having the two basic facilities of toilets and drinking water. A higher proportion of schools in Mahabubnagar reported having toilets (84.2 per cent), as compared to East Godavari (63.2 per cent). But the condition of the toilets was better in East Godavari—53 per cent were in a good condition, while only 21 per cent of the toilets were reported to be in a good condition in Mahabubnagar (Figure 7.5A; Annexure Table A7.13). Field observations also suggested that the actual condition of these toilets was bad in Mahabubnagar, suggesting a lower availability for use by children (see Photos 7.2A and 7.2B).

Bihar

Similarly, in Bihar 92.5 per cent of the surveyed schools had *pucca* buildings, having an average of 2.6 rooms in each school. Approximately, 87 per cent of schools had verandahs in front of the classrooms, and 80–90 per cent of the schools in the two districts surveyed reported using these as classrooms. The inter-district variations were not much with regard to the existence of these facilities (Figure 7.5B; Annexure Table A7.12).

The two states compared

The real difference between the two states, however, was in the number of children who used these classrooms. A far larger number of children used each of these rooms in Bihar as compared to AP. On an average, each classroom in Bihar reported having 80 children, while in AP the average was 38 children, or close to the national norm of 40 children per classroom (Figure 7.5A; Annexure Table A7.12). The differences between districts were high. Gaya reported an average of 65 students using each classroom, whereas in Purnia the average was 93. The overcrowded rooms, along with poor ventilation and no electricity, made the atmosphere inside the room almost unbearable. This also put a lot of stress on the infrastructure.

The current Secretary for School Education, Government of Bihar, recognised this when he stated in an interview, that “...we need almost 300,000 classrooms. What we have now is just half of this number. Looking at the current allocation of resources, we need over ten years to provide for so many rooms. The state is still grappling with basic issues of access and enrolment. Presence of good schools with facilities and teachers is a basic need. Only then can we talk about (*improving*) quality” (emphasis added).¹⁶⁵

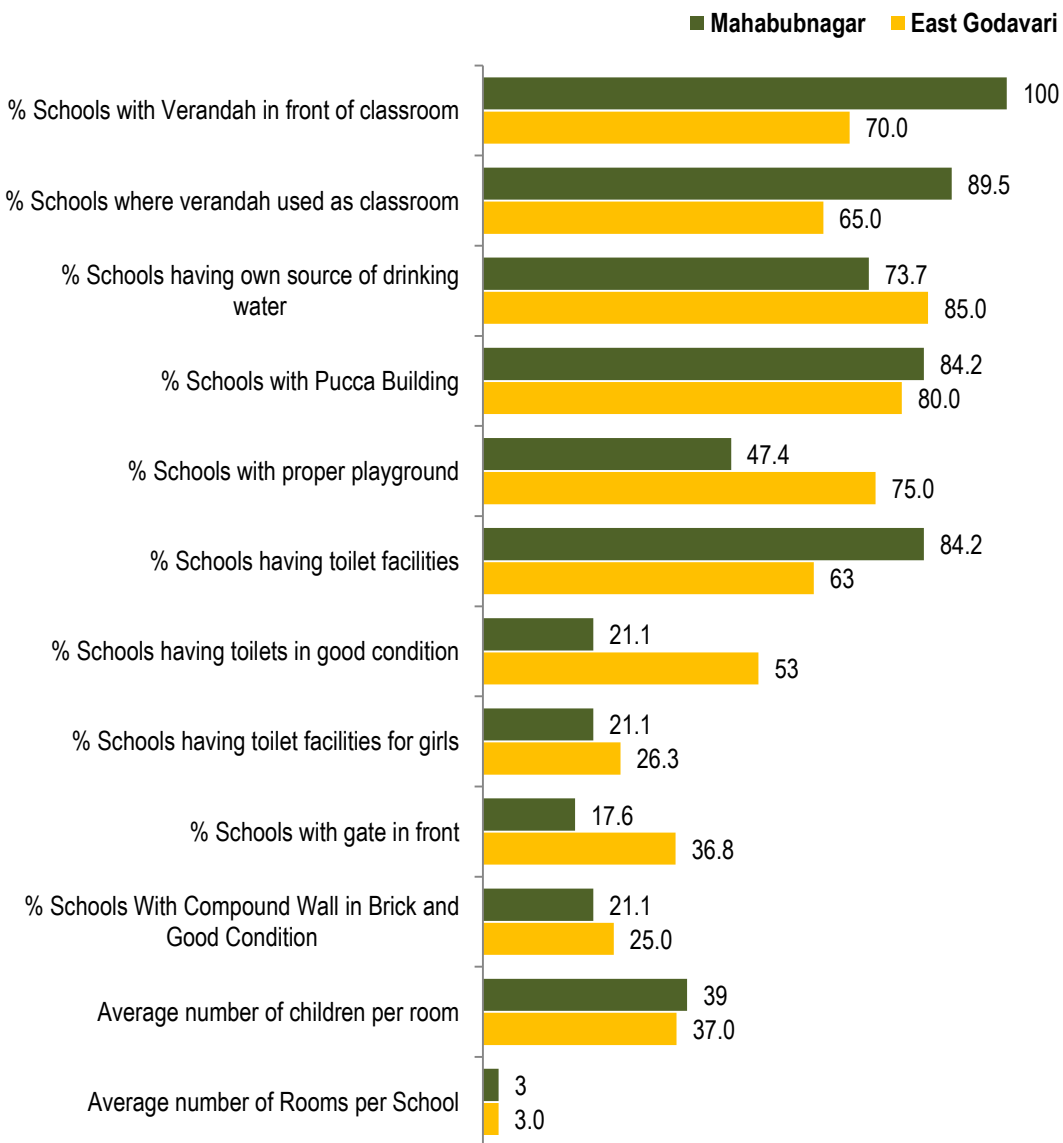
A critical facility was that of toilets for children, especially girls. A very low 17.5 per cent of the schools in Bihar had toilets as compared to 73.7 per cent in AP. An even lower proportion of these were actually in a usable condition.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Personal Interview with Mr. Anjani Kumar, State Project Director, Bihar Education Project, Patna, 6 October 2005.

¹⁶⁶ Photos 7.2A and 7.2B give some indication of the poor condition of toilets in Gaya and Mahabubnagar respectively.

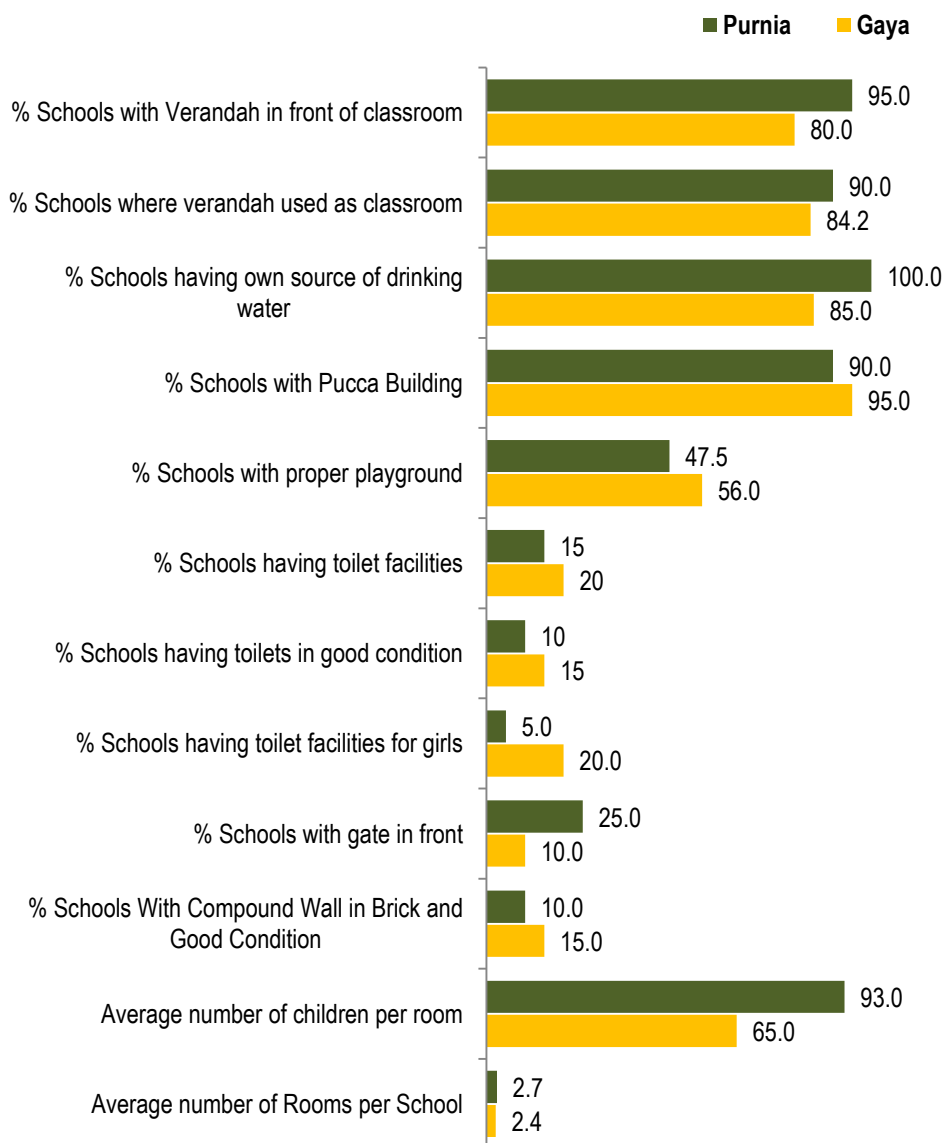


Figure 7.5A: Physical Infrastructure in Schools in Andhra Pradesh



Source: School survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005-06

Figure 7.5 B: Physical Infrastructure in Schools in Bihar



Source: School Survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005-06

Teachers: Availability, Quality, and Interactions with the Community

On the basis of school observations and a survey in the educationally backward BIMARU states in north India, the PROBE report (1999 p. 54) noted: “If any single resource factor can make the difference between a poor school and a successful school, it is the commitment and initiative of the teacher.” These observations were confirmed by what I found during the course of my field work. Even in very remote areas in *mandals* and blocks noted for very low literacy rates, teachers were observed to be making a difference in the way in which the schools functioned even in the midst of poor school infrastructure and scarce support from the state. In Baysi block in Purnia, the primary school in Hijala (not very far from the Gotphar school mentioned earlier) was functioning well. Like the Gotphar school, this one too faced constraints of access during the rainy season but unlike the Gotphar school this one was functioning well, it had good attendance and the school meal programme was efficiently run. It was the teacher in this school who made all the difference. To overcome problems of access during the rainy season, he built a check-dam with support from the community to restrict the flow of rain water.

In Mahabubnagar’s Dharur *mandal*, the Bureddypalli primary school had near total attendance even in the afternoon. The notebooks were impressive, with clear writing in Telugu and English. The high attendance and academic standards were credited to the hard work of lady teacher, S. Noorjehan. In the same district, the efforts of M. Janakramulu, the only teacher in the Manthatti primary school with 52 children on the rolls, made a difference.¹⁶⁷ The attendance was nearly 85 per cent, despite there being a festival related to a local deity in the village. In the last four months, the school had moved up from the lowest “Grade D” to “Grade B” in the Education Department’s ranking of school quality.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ PS Manthatti was located in Nagarkarnoolmandal, Mahabubnagar district.

¹⁶⁸ Schools in AP were being evaluated on the basis of academic performance of students under the Child Language Improvement Programme (CLIP), and were ranked on this basis.

Beyond these individual cases where teachers' efforts made a big difference to schools, some of the systematic differences in school outcomes in the two states were also due to the differences in the availability and quality of teacher resources.

i. Availability of teacher resources

Andhra Pradesh

On average, schools in both the states had three teachers, but the real difference was in the number of students that each teacher was expected to handle. Expressed as the "pupil-teacher ratio" (PTR),¹⁶⁹ in AP the average was 29 students for every teacher. In both districts in the state, this ratio was well within the national norm,¹⁷⁰ indicating adequate teacher presence. Teacher vacancy rates were also low in the state, with East Godavari reporting a lower vacancy rate (9 per cent) than Mahabubnagar (21 per cent) (Annexure Table A7.14). The state also had a high proportion of female teachers (41.6 per cent), and the inter-district differences in this regard were noteworthy. Nearly 48 per cent of the teachers in East Godavari were female, while in Mahabubnagar, the proportion of female teachers was lower (35 per cent) (see Annexure Table A7.15). East Godavari, the district with better literacy rates, had both lower teacher vacancies and a higher proportion of female teachers.

The presence of female teachers in primary schools has been noted to have a positive effect on female enrolment, and in creating a more comfortable and less violent environment for young children (PROBE report 1999 p. 55). Although it is difficult to draw conclusions based on hard evidence in this regard, my field observations showed a better school environment in East Godavari than in Mahabubnagar. Indeed in the latter district, I gathered evidence of use of violence against children in schools.

¹⁶⁹ "Pupil-teacher ratio" (PTR) is the ratio of the total number of enrolled students to the total number of teachers.

¹⁷⁰ The national norm with respect to the pupil-teacher ratio is 40:1.

Bihar

The average PTR in Bihar was 1.7 times higher than in AP. The inadequacy of teacher resources in the state becomes more evident, when seen alongside the high vacancy rates in the state. Nearly half the sanctioned posts were vacant in both districts of Bihar at the time of the survey (Annexure Table A7.14). In an interview, the Bihar Government's Secretary for Education (cited earlier) emphasised that the presence of at least one teacher in every school being a basic requirement, without which there could be no discussion of improving school quality.¹⁷¹

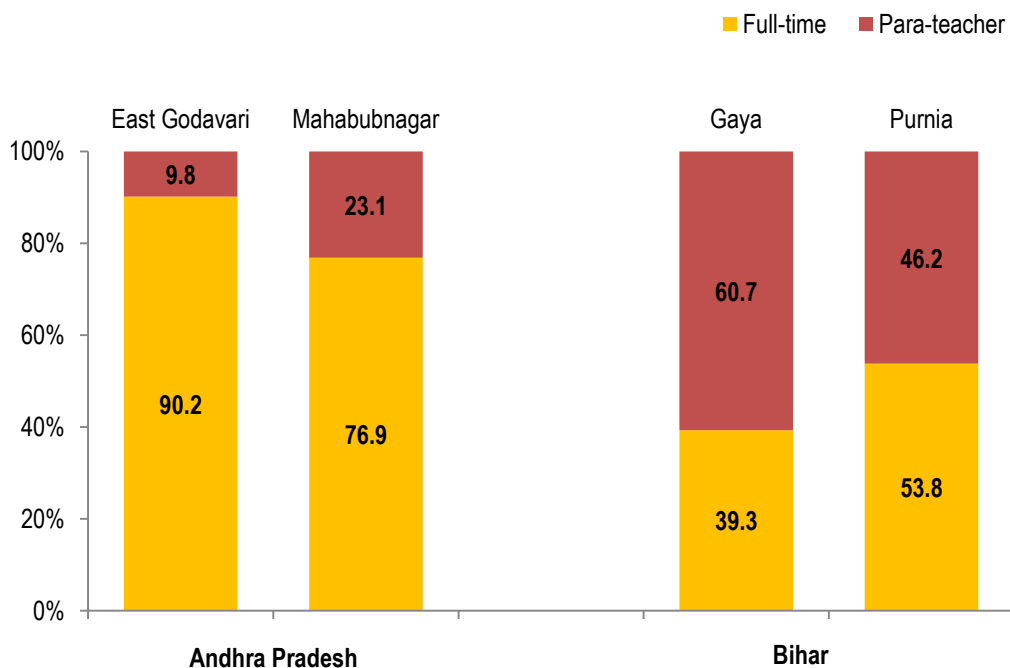
The proportion of female teachers in the state was only 31.7 per cent, 10 points lower than that in AP. There was a 13 percentage point difference between the proportion of female teachers in the two districts of AP, whereas the difference in the two districts in Bihar was marginally lower at 11 per cent (Annexure Table A7.15).

ii. Employment status and educational qualification of teachers

There were two other areas of concern in Bihar: the presence of a large number of para-teachers, and lower educational qualifications of teachers. More than half the teachers in the surveyed areas in the state were para-teachers, employed on contract and on the basis of lower eligibility criteria for educational qualifications. The proportion of para-teachers in the state was almost three times more than that in AP and was indicative of the fact that this is how teacher vacancies in the state were being dealt with. East Godavari had the lowest proportion of para-teachers while Gaya had the highest (Figure 7.6, Annexure Table A7.15).

¹⁷¹ Personal Interview with Mr Anjani Kumar, State Project Director, Bihar Education Project, Patna, 6 October 2005.

Figure 7.6: Percentage Distribution of Teachers by Employment Status



Source: School Survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005-06.

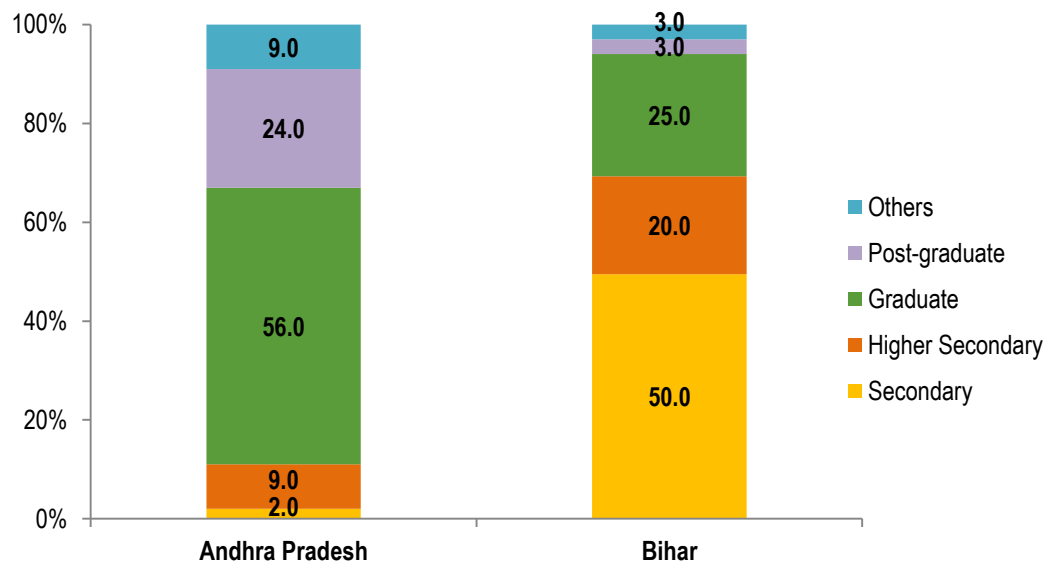
Note: Para-teachers refers to teachers employed on contract for a short period. It includes part-time

The educational qualifications of the teachers in the two states were also different. Nearly 80 per cent of the teachers in AP had been through university education, at the under-graduate or post-graduate level, whereas 70 per cent of the teachers in Bihar had only been through school education (Figure 7.7). Notwithstanding the high educational qualifications of teachers in Andhra Pradesh, there were complaints about poor motivation of teachers and their attitude towards the children. In both Mahabubnagar and East Godavari, there was a feeling that teachers in government schools were more qualified and were paid better, but teachers in private schools worked harder.¹⁷² On the basis of the research done it is difficult to conclude how much difference the attitude of teachers made to children attending schools, or to the quality of teaching. What was

¹⁷²Personal interviews with Bhaskar Goud, *sarpanch* Musapet, Mahabubnagar, 14 February 2006, and Muthuraju, officer with the SarvaShikshaAbhiyan, East Godavari District Programme Office, Kakinada, 6 March 2006.

apparent though was a greater enthusiasm amongst teachers all over East Godavari district as compared to an indifferent attitude amongst those in Mahabubnagar.

Figure 7.7 : Percentage Distribution of Teachers across Educational Qualifications



Source: School Survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005-06.

The lower educational qualification levels of teachers in Bihar became a bigger issue when seen alongside the fact that the state was also facing a huge shortfall of trained teachers. Whereas a majority of the teachers in AP had received training prior to their joining the profession, in Bihar there was a major lack of trained teachers. The scale of the challenge was highlighted by Job Zachariah, Education Programme Officer with UNICEF in Bihar, when he stated that nearly 50 per cent of the 200,000 teachers in the state were untrained, and the government had no policy to train them. This was in contravention of the national norms on training requirements for teachers put in place by the National Council for Teacher Education. In 1991, the erstwhile government of Chief Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav put an end to the policy of providing teacher training in primary teacher education colleges, thus drastically reducing the number of trained teachers in the state. Zachariah described the staff in these institutions as “sitting idle,

completely uninvolved with the teacher training activities undertaken by the Bihar Education Project as a part of the reform activities”.¹⁷³

Hence, it did not come as a surprise that poor people perceived lack of teaching staff and their incompetence when they did exist, to be the main problems with government schools—70.6 per cent of the households in Bihar thought that teachers were incompetent as compared to just 1.9 per cent in AP. The other significant complaints in Bihar were about teachers attending schools irregularly and not coming on time, with nearly 50 per cent of the households reporting these to be a problem in government schools (Annexure Table A7.19).

iii. Teacher-parent interactions

Andhra Pradesh

A majority of the households in AP (56.5 per cent) reported regular interaction with teachers on the performance of their children in school. The regularity was higher in East Godavari than in Mahabubnagar (Annexure Table A7.16). On the academic front, one of the small but expected issues on which parents and teachers interacted was home assignments. In AP, assigning homework to students seemed to be a state-wide practice, with nearly 90 per cent of the households reporting that their children got homework, and teachers checked the work done by the children. East Godavari did better than Mahabubnagar on both these counts, with nearly 10 per cent higher reports of children receiving homework and their work being checked by teachers. Households in AP also reported more involvement of adult family members in assisting children and of teachers in checking homework, than in Bihar. Inter-district variations were sharp, as the proportion of households reporting adult support to children in their work was 20 percentage points lower in Mahabubnagar than in East Godavari. On this issue, Mahabubnagar fared better than Purnia (low literacy district) and worse than Gaya (high literacy district) in Bihar (Annexure Table A7.17).

¹⁷³ Personal interview with Job Zachariah, Education Programme Officer, UNICEF-Bihar, UNICEF Office, Patliputra, Patna, 6 October 2005. Zachariah was an officer of the Indian Administrative Service, who served in the Central Government’s Department of School Education before joining UNICEF.

Bihar

The situation in Bihar was in sharp contrast. It was surprising to note that an overwhelming majority (nearly 76 per cent) of the households reported that the teacher had rarely or never told them about the performance of their children in school. A very small percentage of the households (8.5 per cent) reported regular interaction with teachers, and the frequency of this interaction seemed to be uniformly poor, as inter-district variations were not much (Annexure Table A7.16). Only 45.5 per cent of the households reported that their children were given homework, half the number in AP. There were significant inter-district variations, with a higher proportion of households in Gaya (better literacy district) reporting that their children received homework that was checked in school and adult members helped the children with their studies at home. Poor school-community interactions provided possible answers to the poor performance of Purnia in Bihar (Annexure Table A7.17).

School Incentives: Mid-day Meals Signify a Difference in School Culture

What clearly differentiated school culture in the two states was the delivery of two important school based incentives—textbooks and meals. Under two different schemes of the central government, there was universal entitlement to free textbooks and school lunch (known as the mid-day meal programme) for all children who attended government primary schools. The MDM programme had a special significance as it was taken up under the watchful eye of federal courts. While AP reported a near universal reach of both these incentives in both districts, in the case of Bihar only 40 per cent of the parents reported that their children were getting mid-day meals in school; the situation was equally poor in both districts. The reach of textbooks in the state was half of what the government had planned for. Since resources were being provided for both these incentive schemes, poor reach was an indication of the potential diversion of public resources. Bihar's failure to deliver on both these was also indicative of the state having very weak capacity to serve the poor.

Field observations on the working of the MDM programme highlighted the strong involvement of the community and the local state in providing school meals in AP, and apathy and neglect by the local state in Bihar. In the latter state, the non-involvement of the community in providing meals for their own children was particularly surprising.

Andhra Pradesh

School meals in AP were being provided by women and their self-help groups, who were involved in cooking the meals. The meals had a menu plan, and occasionally eggs or butter-milk was also given to the students. All the children ate together and the meal seemed like a collective feast.¹⁷⁴ There were some complaints in Mahabubnagar about the quality of rice, delay in supplies, or meals not being tasty. The more significant complaint in Mahabubnagar was about the lack of water to cook the meals, and children having to carry water bottles from home. But in neither district did I come across any complaint of grain pilferage, or meals not being provided.

Bihar

In Gaya, the quality of the meals was better than in Purnia, and a semblance of organisation could be seen. Yet, the non-involvement of the community in getting together to feed its own children was evident. Schools had appointed servants to cook meals for over 200–300 students. Caste and community prejudices overwhelmed school interactions as families refused to let children come to school with their own plates for eating meals: “Only beggars move around with steel plates and bowls”.¹⁷⁵ Girls at the Adarsh Madhya Vidyalay Silonjha, Belaganj, Gaya ate their meals separately from boys. Many girls, especially from the upper castes, brought their lunch from home, as they would not eat with boys of a lower caste. Also, no women from the village were involved in the cooking of the school lunch in Silonjha or other schools observed in

¹⁷⁴ The researcher carried a box of sweets for school children, to be shared at meal time.

¹⁷⁵ Personal interaction with parents at Adarsh Madhyamik Vidyalay, Silonjha, Belaganj, Gaya, 1 October 2005.

Bihar. This was a contrast to what I observed in AP, where it was the women who cooked and managed the school lunch programme entirely, with the support of self-help groups.

Field observations from Baysi block in Purnia completed the picture of apathy with dirty unwashed vessels used for cooking MDMs strewn around in classrooms. In many places, insects crawled from the rice cooked for children.

To a certain extent, the poor quality of school meals was due to the low involvement of the community, especially women. Miki Tanae, Project Officer with UNICEF working on education and women, confirmed that the non-involvement of women was resulting in poor quality of school meals. The situation was different in some areas of the state, she said, where women from the *Mahila Samakhya*¹⁷⁶ group had taken up the responsibility for school lunch. But this was an intervention limited only to some areas of Bihar, and not a state-wide phenomenon.¹⁷⁷ Perhaps the larger issue was the existence of organised vested interests around schools in Bihar which were diverting what was due to the poor. The poor kept away from both schools and free lunch programmes because of their inability to fight these vested interests.

7.4 Explaining Results on the Ground: Role of Interests, Institutions, and Political Actors

A review of “results on the ground” tells us that schools in AP looked very different from those in Bihar. As seen from schools and villages, the major differences were indicative of initiatives from the “top” in AP (or lack of it in Bihar): state policies in teacher recruitments and infrastructure such as roads and school buildings, were outside the control of local institutions or political factors. Yet, variations in teacher attitudes, schools and community interactions, and poor working of the schools, especially the

¹⁷⁶Mahila Samakhya is a programme for women’s empowerment in rural areas, working since 1991 as a part of the reform efforts undertaken by the BEP.

¹⁷⁷ Personal interview, MikiTanae, UNICEF Office, Patna, 5 October 2005.

school lunch programme for which a similar resource support had been provided to schools across the country, were compelling arguments for probing the role of the “local”. Although I have not looked at issues of teaching or learning quality, it may be appropriate to mention here that I noticed special efforts in East Godavari schools to improve the quality of learning. These included the “library on strings” in Razule *mandal*, and special alphabets for tribal children in Prathipadu *mandal* (see Photos 7.3 and 7.4 respectively). I now examine the specific “local” role of politics viewed in terms of organised interests and institutions working around schools, and the role of local political actors.

Institutions: Role of the Local State

A key difference between the field sites in AP and Bihar was a far greater presence of local education authorities in the field in AP as compared to their near absence in Bihar. This was significant as the presence of the institution of the state at the local level was felt through its functionaries in the field—MEOs in AP and the BEOs in Bihar.

Andhra Pradesh

There were two important differences in the way in which the local education offices were structured in the two states. First, the *mandal* was a much smaller unit than the block, as a result of which the MEO had fewer schools to look after in a smaller geographical area. Second, below the MEOs, there was a group of MRPs, one for every 7–10 schools. MRPs were field officers, selected from amongst teachers who provided academic support to schools.

In both districts in AP, I met the MEOs in the field, and MRPs were seen providing academic support to teachers while teaching in schools. MRPs visited every school at least twice every month, and stayed in the school for the entire day. On their

visit, they taught in the classes and reviewed teachers' diaries, among other things.¹⁷⁸ The MEOs had a very clear idea of their role and the performance of schools in their *mandal*. Since detailed household surveys were held by the Education Department, *mandal* officers knew the families where children had dropped-out from school. The MRPs provided a continuous link between schools and the *mandal* office, reporting to the MEOs after school hours.

Even though it was pointed out that the post of the MRP was preferred by teachers to avoid postings in remote areas, and it may very well have been an opportunity of this kind for teachers, but this "opportunity" was translated into an advantage by enhanced field presence of the local state. Delays in postings of MEOs, was seen as being responsible for the somewhat inferior performance of schools in several *mandals* in Mahabubnagar (some positions were vacant at the time of the field visit).¹⁷⁹

Bihar

The comparable officers in Bihar were the BEOs, who seldom visited schools and provided no support to teachers. They visualised their role mainly as administrators and supervisors, and had no idea of the problems that the schools were facing. They were also unaware of people's grievances. An example of this was the denial by the Belaganj BEO of high drop-out rates or low attendance being a problem in this block.¹⁸⁰ He and the other BEOs interviewed, identified the MDM programme to be the biggest problem in schools.¹⁸¹ Further, they did not share a cordial relationship with the teachers, and blamed them for all the problems in schools. The BEO of Fatehpur block expressed this when he said that "teachers ought to be posted 100 kilometres away from their home so

¹⁷⁸The researcher noted that MRPs in both the districts were well versed with the school text and poetry recited by children. They sang along with the children when they recited some of the poetry. The teachers and children recognised the MRPs and greeted them cordially, a testimony to the good relations between schools, the community, and the administration.

¹⁷⁹Personal Interview with Mr Rajeshwar, Assistant Programme Coordinator, *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, Mahabubnagar, 28 February 2006.

¹⁸⁰ The survey showed a low figure of 52 per cent actual attendance in the block.

¹⁸¹Personal interview with Rampravesh Singh, Block Education Officer, Belaganj, Gaya, 2 October 2005.

that they stay in school and are not able to go home.¹⁸² Negligence of duties by BEOs reinforced the picture of schools being abandoned by the state. Nearly 70 per cent of the households in Bihar cited lack of supervision by BEOs as a major problem in the functioning of schools (Annexure Table A7.19).

Interests Working Around Schools

-Teacher Unions in Local Contexts

In the theory of political economy, organised teacher interests are viewed as a political constraint in initiating school reform. In the backdrop of this observation it was interesting to note the local variations in the role played by teacher unions in AP, and their disinterest in school reform in Bihar.

In East Godavari, the reform agenda received close support from the United Teachers' Front (UTF), one of the influential unions in the district that is affiliated to the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) political party. Many of the officers on the reform team, including its project coordinator, Mr D. N. Murthy, were erstwhile office bearers of the UTF. The close association of the union with the reform process allowed it to function closely with the district administration and resolve teacher grievances. For its parent political party, the CPI-M, this became an opportunity for evolving a hold on grassroots politics and competing with rival parties like the CPI-ML.

Mahabubnagar presented a different picture: rival unions were in conflict over the issue of teacher transfers. The *Panchayati Raj* Teachers Union (PRTU) and the State Teachers Union (STU) were in conflict with each other, as their influence in the region was dependent on getting teachers loyal to them posted in the district. This conflict left its impact on teachers in the district. In the *Prathmik Pathshala* Vemoula, Mahabubnagar, students of grades 1, 2, and 4 sat together. A fourth grade student taught them, while the teachers were huddled together in one corner, discussing the issue of teacher transfers in the district.

¹⁸²Personal interview with Ishwar Singh, Fatehpur block, Gaya, 3 October 2005.

-Vested Interests in Bihar

Teacher unions had no local presence in either of the two districts in Bihar, and their block units were defunct. In place of organised teacher interests, what could be seen around schools were vested interests. The poor functioning of the MDM programme and complaints about the low quality of the meal and pilferage of grain were indicative of a thriving local political economy of rent-seeking. The differences in expectations of the poor people and the thinking of the local state officials about this programme were a pointer to such opportunities:

The children get very poor quality meals in the school. The teacher replaces the grains supplied by the government with poor quality ones. The dal (lentil) has no taste, as there are no spices in it, only salt. The children feed these meals to stray dogs. Children of poor people like us cannot hope for anything better from the government. (Munni Devi, mother of a child attending the primary school in Silonjha village, Belaganj, Gaya).¹⁸³

The mid-day meal programme in schools should be stopped. It is a distraction to teaching activities, and hinders the performance of our educational duties. It encourages pilferage of grains. Storage of grains and cooking food in schools is difficult. Instead, dry food should be supplied through NGOs. (Rambhagat Yadav, BEO, Baysi, Purnia).¹⁸⁴

When I discussed the issue of school meals with villagers in Bihar's Gaya and Purnia districts, it was clear that the poor people wanted the school meals to be supplied properly. They did not want cooked meals to be replaced by a "dry-ration" distribution programme, unlike what the BEO had suggested. They felt that the local officers and many teachers wanted NGOs or the local fair-price shops to distribute dry rations as this was likely to provide opportunities for pilferage and making money. Further, owners of fair-price shops or NGOs were likely to share the spoils with local education officers.

Clearly, individual interests and institutions were working at the local level in Bihar to deny people the benefits of reforms and welfare initiatives driven from the

¹⁸³Personal interactions with community members at Adarsh Madhya Vidyalay, Silonjha, Gaya, 4 October 2005.

¹⁸⁴Personal interview with Rambhagat Yadav, Block Education Officer, Baysi block, Purnia 12 September 2005.

Centre. This denial was leading to distrust for the local state, and a sense of hopelessness among the poor.

Local Political Actors

In neither of the states were political representatives elected by the people involved in the reform process, although the contexts were different.¹⁸⁵ In AP, the representatives were mostly away in Hyderabad, and they seldom visited schools. In Bihar's Purnia district, the local Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) were very closely involved with what was happening in schools, but all they wanted to do was to influence the selection process of teachers and control elections to VECs.¹⁸⁶ In other words, they wanted to become influential players in the local control over schools.

The local political institutions of *panchayats* were closer to the schools. In AP the *panchayats* were not given any real powers over schools. Their expected role was to assist with mobilisation of the community during enrolment drives and contribute resources towards school improvement. During the course of field observations I noted that in many schools in East Godavari, the *sarpanch* took a keen interest and played a role in mobilising resources for the school, provided support for construction activities, or helped with resolving disputes.

One role expected of the *panchayats* was of payment of salary to para-teachers, known as *vidya volunteers* in AP. There were complaints of abuse of this power in Mahabubnagar. In the Vemoula school, three *vidya volunteers* had been employed as a temporary measure to manage the increase in enrolments. They taught, but complained that they were not paid regularly. When the *gram panchayat* paid them after a delay of six months, it was less than their due. An unofficial rent had been extracted by powerful locals from these para-teachers who had no backing from the teacher unions in the district. However, unlike in Bihar, complaints of corruption were not as rampant in AP.

¹⁸⁵ There were two sets of directly elected political representatives—Members of the State Legislative Assembly, known as MLAs and Members of Parliament at the Centre, known as MPs.

¹⁸⁶ Interviews with MLAs Haji Subhan and former MLA Md. Aalim, Purnia, 20 September 2005.

In any case, the hiring of para-teachers was seen only as a temporary measure in the state unlike Bihar where all new appointments made were of para-teachers.

The hiring of a large number of para-teachers in Bihar under the *Panchayat Shiksha Mitra* scheme was done by political heads of *panchayats*—the *mukhiyas*—and there were complaints of rampant corruption. Assessing “quality” was hardly a criterion of selection, and people in both the surveyed districts in Bihar cited a common figure of Rs.10,000 that had to be paid to *panchayat* heads as bribe for these appointments. Further, many *Panchayat Shiksha Mitras* complained that they were not paid regularly, and that the *panchayat* head deducted a certain amount as commission before giving them their salaries.¹⁸⁷ Common knowledge among people of bribes being taken for appointing para-teachers, and use of discretion in appointments confirmed that schools in Bihar were functioning under pressure from local vested interests. The poor also knew that political leaders in the state were not interested in stopping these malpractices.

¹⁸⁷Panchayat Shiksha Mitras Amit Kumar Yadav, Hemlata Kumari Paswan, Kanchan Kumari, Farhat Bano, and Siyaram Prasad Yadav, Belaganj Block Office, Gaya, 4 October 2005.

Photo 7.3: Library on a String, Razule Mandal, East Godavari, Andhra Pradesh



(Photos 7.3 and 7.4 by Mansi Midha)

Photo 7.4: Special Alphabets for Tribal Children, Prathipadu Mandal, East Godavari, AP.



Photo 7.5: Empty classrooms, Jadcherla Mandal , Mahabubnagar, Andhra Pradesh



(Photo by Mansi Midha)

7.5 Conclusion: The Role of Local Politics in Educational Reform

At the outcome level, school participation as reported by the households confirmed higher rates of participation in AP and smaller differences across regions, somewhat bridging the perception of the existence of different levels of educational performance within the same state. These differences persisted in Bihar, and Purnia selected for its poor educational indicators, continued to be a laggard, with low school participation. The two states also differed on how disadvantaged social groups, identified on the basis of caste and gender, performed. AP had progressed by closing gender gaps and improving the participation of SCs.

On the ground, one of the main reasons for the better performance in AP was improved access to schools, on account of there being more number of schools and

better road connectivity. The other main difference was the greater availability and better quality of teacher resources. All these inputs were mainly due to support from the state, especially from the political leadership in Hyderabad. State policies and resources for building roads, and appointing and training teachers, were missing in Bihar.

But there were nuances as to how the schools functioned locally, and it would be erroneous to construe support from the top alone as being responsible for differences in outcomes. Schools in the two states, and the districts within them, exhibited differences in working culture and attitudes; each of these were significant in explaining why things worked better in AP and not in Bihar.

Two such local factors that provided a somewhat strong explanation of differences in the working of schools in AP were school-community relations and teacher attitudes. A visible difference between the schools in East Godavari and Mahabubnagar was better school-community relations in the former. As a result, even with the poor physical quality of the buildings, schools in East Godavari had a vibrant atmosphere. In comparison, schools in Mahabubnagar wore a deserted look.

Another visible difference between schools in East Godavari and Mahabubnagar was teacher attitude towards children. Teachers' indifference in Mahabubnagar was expressed in subtle ways such as just sitting around and not teaching and performing their jobs as if they were "government servants", with no real connection to the people. Of course, photographs of sticks lying on teachers' tables in schools in the district went a long way in to reinforce the notion that teaching was considered an administrative job.

An important influence on teacher attitudes in the two districts in AP was the relationship between the reform team and the teacher unions. In East Godavari, the UTF, aligned with the CPI-M led the reform team, and was also the strongest union in the district. It had a certain control over teachers, and also took up teacher related issues with the district's Education Department. It was interesting to note that while the CPI-M and CPI (M-L) were daggers drawn in the political arena, there was implicit cooperation between them in implementing the school reform agenda in East Godavari.

Weak school-community relations were observable in the way in which schools functioned in Bihar. There was low involvement of parents in their children's school activities, including in the cooking and management of meals. There were no clear responses on why children were not sent to schools even when they were functional, and response such as "child not interested", were only pointers to this indifference. In isolated instances where the community took an interest, things did work better—building a check-dam in the Hijala school in Purnia being one example. But such instances were rare. In Bihar it was more the case that schools were surrounded by local vested interests, against the power of which they had no hope of fighting. School-community relations worked as a factor in building better schools only under conditions where the state had ensured the basic minimum requirements of quality, identified by Bihar government official Anjani Kumar as the "presence of classrooms, at least one teacher, and functional roads. Without this basic there could be no discussion about quality".¹⁸⁸

Indifference of teachers towards children and the poor was marked in Bihar. They behaved like government officers, who could come and go at will, with little supervision by the state authorities above them. In the absence of regular contact with the block or district administration, schools were like abandoned institutions, and teachers behaved like agents of the state (that had no presence in the field). Teachers were also under the control of local vested interests that were capable of siphoning off resources meant for the poor; these vested interests exercised control over teachers by threats of transfers to remote locations. New powers of appointment of para-teachers greatly enhanced the powers of vested interests.

These differences between AP and Bihar made it seem that the two states were at different stages of educational development. Bihar was still struggling with basics like getting classrooms and teachers in place; it also faced huge demographic pressures,

¹⁸⁸ Personal interview with Mr Anjani Kumar, State Project Director, Bihar Education Project, Patna, 6 October 2005.


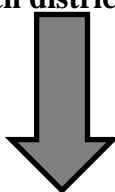
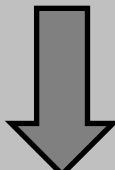
whereas in AP there were adequate teachers and classrooms, and the child population was declining.

Better schools in AP did not mean an absence of politics, understood as “constraints” to school reform in the political economy approach. Instead, the state political leadership established the basic conditions for effective schooling, and then used strategies of competitive politics to curb local vested interests. Schools in Bihar were hemmed in by these interests—the *panchayat* head extracting bribes for teacher appointments, pilferage of grains meant for school meals, poor children not getting their textbooks, and negligent teachers and BEOs. Even the state leadership had been unable to break this local stranglehold.

For poor people in both the states what they received from the reforms for over a decade, was contingent on the actions of state political leaders. Local political actions mattered only after the essential basic steps had been taken.

Annexure A7

Table A7.1: Stages of, and criteria for selection of field sites, survey schools, and households

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Selection of Units</i>	<i>Criteria</i>
<i>Step 1</i>	Districts—2 in each state 	Contrasting educational indicators.* District 1 –better educational indicators. District 2-poor educational indicators. (Total 4)
<i>Step 2</i>	Sub-district units—2 in each district 	<i>Mandal</i> 1—better educational indicators. <i>Mandal</i> 2—poor educational indicators. (Total 8)
<i>Step 3</i>	Schools—10 in each sub-district unit 	Random selection from list of primary schools available with the district education office (Total 40)
<i>Step 4</i>	Households—100 in each sub-district unit	Random selection of 10 households from school records of each school selected. (Total 400)

*Note: The educational indicator used was that of the literacy rate provided by the Census of India 2001.

Table A7.2: Characteristics of Sample (Schools and Households), Field Survey, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar

	Literacy Rate	No. of schools surveyed	Total no. of teachers in schools surveyed	Total enrolment in schools surveyed	No. of households surveyed in mandal/block
Andhra Pradesh					
District 1: Mandals selected in East Godavari district					
Pratipadu	49.02	10	29	1429	100
Razole	80.10	10	32	779	99
District Total	65.48	20	61	2208	199
District 2: Mandals selected in Mahabubnagar district					
Dharur	25.86	9	18	503	100
Jadcherla	58.29	10	34	570	98
District Total	44.41	19	52	1073	198
Andhra Pradesh Total	60.49	39	113	3281	397
Bihar					
District 1: Blocks selected in Gaya district					
Belaganj	52.94	10	36	892	100
Fatehpur	40.13	10	25	1336	100
District Total	50.45	20	61	2228	200
District 2: Blocks selected in Purnia district					
Kasba	35.13	9	30	2646	100
Baysi	28.03	11	48	1858	110
District Total	35.10	20	78	4504	210
Bihar Total	47.00	40	139	6732	410

Sources: Census of India, 2001 for literacy rates (col.1); School and household survey in selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Table A7.3: Percentage Distribution of Households by Social Caste Within Districts

Districts	SCs	STs	OBC-I	OBC-II	General	Total
East Godavari	18.6	23.1	35.7	10.6	12.1	100
Mahabubnagar	25.8	7.6	57.6	3	6.1	100
Andhra Pradesh	22.2	15.4	46.6	6.8	9.1	100
Gaya	44	2.5	5.5	41.5	6.5	100
Purnia	36.8	4.3	4.8	39.7	14.4	100
Bihar	40.3	3.4	5.1	40.6	10.5	100

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Table A7.4: Percentage Distribution of Households by Religion Within Districts

Districts	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Total
East Godavari	89.9	1.0	9.0	100
Mahabubnagar	94.9	5.1	0	100
Andhra Pradesh	92.4	3.0	4.5	100
Gaya	91.5	8.0	0.5	100
Purnia	44.5	55.5	0	100
Bihar	67.5	32.3	0.2	100

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Table A7. 5: Average Number of Children per Family and Percentage Distribution of Children by Age Group, District Level

States/ Districts	Average number of children per household	Percentage distribution by age group (in completed years)				
		0 – 4	5 – 9	10 – 14	14 – 17	Total
East Godavari	2.07	10.2	48.3	36.7	4.9	100.0
Mahabubnagar	2.45	9.7	47.5	36.2	6.6	100.0
Andhra Pradesh	2.26	9.9	47.9	36.4	5.8	100.0
Gaya	3.37	18.0	38.2	36.1	7.7	100.0
Purnia	3.87	19.2	40.8	29.3	10.6	100.0
Bihar	3.62	18.7	39.6	32.4	9.3	100.0

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06

Table A7.6: School Participation Rates in Survey Districts (% Children)

State/District	% Children currently enrolled in school		% Children dropped-out		% Children never attended	
	6–10 years	6–13 years	6–10 years	6–13 years	6–10 years	6–13 years
East Godavari	95.0	93.1	2.0	2.6	3.0	4.3
Mahabubnagar	93.1	89.2	2.2	5.2	4.8	5.7
Andhra Pradesh	94.0	91.0	2.1	4.0	4.0	5.0
Gaya	81.3	78.6	5.8	11.0	12.8	10.4
Purnia	69.9	72.3	5.4	10.0	24.4	17.5
Bihar	74.9	75.2	5.6	10.5	19.4	14.2

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Note: Children aged 6–10 years are eligible for primary school; children aged 6–13 years are eligible for elementary school.

Table A7.7: Percentage of Currently Enrolled Children (6–13 years) by Social Caste and Gender, District Level

State/District	Sub-district and social caste	Children 6 to 13 years enrolled* (%)		Gender differential**
		Boys	Girls	
Andhra Pradesh				
East Godavari	Total	93.8	92.4	0.98
Mahabubnagar	Total	90.3	87.6	0.97
	SC	90.7	82.1	0.90
	ST	90.9	83.7	0.92
	OBC-I	91.1	92.0	1.01
	OBC-II	100.0	100.0	1.00
	OBC Total	95.3	95.3	1.00
	General	95.3	96.8	1.01
Andhra Pradesh	Total	91.9	89.9	0.98
Bihar				
Gaya	Total	81.4	75.4	0.93
Purnia	Total	75.1	69.8	0.93
	SC	73.9	63.3	0.86
	ST	77.8	63.2	0.81
	OBC-I	80.8	77.8	0.96
	OBC-II	80.6	77.7	0.96
	OBC Total	80.7	77.7	0.96
	General	82.4	84.2	1.02
Bihar	Total	78	72.4	0.93

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Notes: * Children aged 6–13 years eligible for elementary school; **Gender differential was calculated by dividing the participation rate for girls by the participation rate for boys. The closer the value of the differential (reported in col. 3) is to unity (1), the less the differential.

Table A7.8: Percentage of Currently Enrolled Children (6–13 years) in Elementary by Social Caste, District Level

State/District	SCs	STs	OBC-I	OBC-II	OBC-Total	General	Total
East Godavari	88.3	84.3	97.5	100	98.1	100	93.1
Mahabubnagar	86.5	100	88.3	100	88.9	89.3	89.2
Andhra Pradesh	87.2	88.3	91.5	100	92.5	95.9	91
Gaya	72.5	70	91.3	82.1	82.9	85.7	78.6
Purnia	65.3	70.4	70	76.3	75.6	82	72.4
Bihar	69	70.3	79.2	79.2	79.2	83.1	75.3

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Table A7.9: Percentage of Currently Enrolled Children (6–13 years) in Elementary by Religion, District Level

State/District	Religion			Total
	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	
East Godavari	94.9	50	82.9	93.1
Mahabubnagar	89.3	87	NA	89.2
Andhra Pradesh	91.8	81.5	82.9	91
Gaya	78.5	77.8	100	78.6
Purnia	72.1	72.9	NA	72.6
Bihar	76.3	73.5	100	75.4

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Table A7.10: Number of Students Marked Present as Per School Records and Actual Presence on the Day of School Visit

Sub-district/District	Attendance marked present in school register (number)			Headcount (students present as percentage of those marked present)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
East Godavari	92	106	199	89.1	88.7	88.4
Mahabubnagar	112	108	221	80.4	83.3	81.4
Andhra Pradesh	204	214	420	84.3	86.0	84.7
Gaya	201	171	373	50.7	48.5	49.6
Purnia	355	270	625	43.4	45.2	44.3
Bihar	556	441	998	46.0	46.5	46.3

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Table A7.11: Selected Data on School Accessibility—Year of Opening, Distance from Nearest Village, and Type of Approach Road (% of Schools within District)

State/District	Schools within 1 km of village	Schools opened within the last 10 years	Schools opened within the last 20 years*	Schools with pucca/semi-pucca approach road
East Godavari	80	15	30	100
Mahabubnagar	73.7	5.3	21.1	89.5
Andhra Pradesh	76.9	10.3	25.6	94.9
Gaya	40	5	25	55
Purnia	60	0	5.3	55
Bihar	50	2.6	15.4	55

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Table A7.12: Availability of School Facilities by District (% Schools)

Districts	Schools with <i>pucca</i> building (%)	Schools With compound wall in brick and in a good condition (%)	Schools with verandahs in front of classrooms (%)	Schools where verandahs used as classrooms (%)	Schools with gate in front (%)	Average number of rooms per school	Average number of children per room
East Godavari	80	25	70	65	36.8	3	37
Mahabubnagar	84.2	21.1	100	89.5	17.6	3	39
Andhra Pradesh	82.1	23.1	84.6	76.9	27.8	3	38
Gaya	95	15	80	84.2	10	2.4	65
Purnia	90	10	95	90	25	2.7	93
Bihar	92.5	12.5	87.5	87.2	17.5	2.6	80

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Table A7.13: Percentage of Schools with Toilets and Drinking Water Facilities, by District

State/District	Schools with toilet facilities	Schools with toilet facilities for girls	Schools with toilets in good condition	Schools with own source of drinking water
East Godavari	63.2	26.3	52.6	85
Mahabubnagar	84.2	21.1	21.1	73.7
Andhra Pradesh	73.7	23.7	36.8	79.5
Gaya	20	20	15	85
Purnia	15	5	10	100
Bihar	17.5	12.5	12.5	92.5

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Table A7.14: Teacher Availability and Adequacy, by District

State/District	Average no. of teachers per school	Pupil teacher ratio (PTR)	Enrolled girl child to female teacher ratio (GFTR)	Teacher vacancy rate
East Godavari	3	36	39	8.8
Mahabubnagar	3	21	30	20.5
Andhra Pradesh	3	29	36	13.5
Gaya	3	37	41	57.4
Purnia	4	58	87	47.2
Bihar	3	48	63	51.9

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Notes: (i) Average number of teachers=total number of teachers divided by total number of schools;

(ii) PTR=Total number of enrolled students divided by total number of teachers;

(iii) GFTR=Girl child female teacher ratio-enrolled girl child divided by female teachers.

Table A7.15: Percentage Distribution of Teachers by Gender and Employment Status, by District

State/District	Gender		Employment Status	
	Male	Female	Full-time	Part-time/para-teacher
East Godavari	52.5	47.5	90.2	9.8
Mahabubnagar	65.4	34.6	76.9	23.1
Andhra Pradesh	58.4	41.6	84.1	15.9
Gaya	62.3	37.7	39.3	60.7
Purnia	73.1	26.9	53.8	46.2
Bihar	68.3	31.7	47.5	52.5

Source: Household Survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Table A7.16: Percentage Households Reporting Frequency of Teachers' Reports to Parents about Performance of Child in School, by District

State/District	Household response (%) on frequency of teacher reports to parents about children		
	Regularly	Sometimes	Rarely or never
East Godavari	61.4	25.2	13.4
Mahabubnagar	52.2	26.9	20.8
Andhra Pradesh	56.5	26.1	17.4
Gaya	6.1	15.5	78.4
Purnia	10.8	16.3	72.9
Bihar	8.5	15.9	75.6

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Table A7.17: Children's Homework

% households reporting yes →	Child receives homework	Teacher checks the child's work	Adults helps the child with homework
Districts ↓			
East Godavari	96.7	94.1	70.3
Mahabubnagar	85.1	85.4	49.4
Andhra Pradesh	90.5	89.4	58.8
Gaya	61.1	57.3	56.7
Purnia	30.6	33.8	39.5
Bihar	45.5	45.1	47.9

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

**Table A7.18: Coverage of Mid-Day Meals and Textbooks
(% of Households Reporting “Yes”)**

State/District	Mid-day meal	Books
East Godavari	96.5	98.9
Mahabubnagar	96.5	98.9
Andhra Pradesh	96.5	98.9
Gaya	40.3	62.1
Purnia	37.7	47.6
Bihar	39	54.5

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Note: Per cent households reporting child receives free textbooks and school meal.

**Table A7.19: Households’ Perception of Problems with Government Schools
(% Household Reporting “Yes”)**

State/District	Distance of school from residence	Lack of infrastructure	Lack of teaching staff	Incompetent teaching staff	Unfriendly atmosphere in school	Irregular teachers	Teacher not punctual	Lack of monitoring by BEO/ME O	Lack of pressure from VEC
East Godavari	5.4	79.6	28.5	1.1	5.1	0.6	2.3	36.4	39.4
Mahabubnagar	1.6	86.2	50	2.7	11.2	20.4	24.2	47.2	58.7
Andhra Pradesh	3.5	82.9	39.3	1.9	8.2	10.7	13.5	41.6	48.4
Gaya	13.2	78.8	62.7	67.2	48.9	53.4	59.2	64	66.7
Purnia	17.4	76.5	74.6	74.6	40.4	43.5	44.7	77.2	78.9
Bihar	15.1	77.8	68.1	70.6	45	48.8	52.5	69.5	72

Source: Household survey, selected field sites, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2005–06.

Note: The responses are not mutually exclusive as the respondents were allowed to respond to more than one category.

Chapter 8

Politics Matters: The Continuing Agenda of Educational Reform

Throughout this thesis, I have been concerned with understanding the contested process of educational reform—its design and implementation. I have been particularly concerned with understanding the political dynamics of agenda setting, involving federal actors and institutions (Chapter 3), and implementation in the states in three specific arenas of teacher policies, decentralisation and community participation, and the working of schools (Chapters 5–7). In each of these arenas, I have started with the assumptions of the formal political economy approach to the role of politics in educational reform. But I find the results on the ground to be somewhat “unanticipated” and, indeed puzzling.

Opposition to reform from teacher interests is an assumption embedded both in theory and in policy, and this is where I began. My research, however, shows that such opposition appears to be weaker than expected on the ground in both Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. Besides, I have found evidence of the use of political skills by leaders and policymakers in order to counter possible opposition, and so “align” the interests of teachers with the broader objectives of reform. This leads me to conclude that the resistance and impediments anticipated in theory are far from being insurmountable in practice.

In another arena, the expectations of support from “demand-side” initiatives of decentralisation and community participation have also not been in conformity with the theoretical script. Political leaders at a more “central” level have been able to adapt this institutional reform measure to extend political patronage and so curb the new political competition emerging at the local-level. Different and contrasting roles played by the political leaders, in different arenas—playing the role of a “reform champion” in one, and the “partisan

politician” in another— are indicative of the complex role of politics in the policy reform process.

Both in aligning teacher interests and in making political use of school decentralisation, I conclude that new political opportunities were created in the process of implementing reform. Moreover, often support for implementing change was established where none previously existed. Indeed, “success” in reform outcomes seems more a consequence of these political manoeuvres emanating from the concrete actions of political leaders and policymakers, than from the absence of opposition from collectively organised interest groups and from institutions biased against reform. From each of these arenas, and from the process of policy design as well as implementation, the conclusion I draw is that “politics matters”. This may seem like stating the obvious, but it departs from the conclusions of standard economic approaches to reform.¹⁸⁹

In this chapter I take a step back, move away from the conflicting arenas of educational reform and the specificities of the field sites examined in Chapters 5–7, to address the two general questions that formed the starting point for this research—first, why political leaders and public officials support educational reform even though the odds seem to be against them. And second, the political incentives they find in implementing reform, even though their “logical” calculations based on self-interest are a pointer to the benefits that they are likely to have in blocking change.

The chapter has four sections: in the first I examine some of the achievements of nearly two decades of educational reform efforts in India. In the second I compare across the arenas of policy design and implementation to examine which actors, interests, and institutions have made a difference, and at what levels in explaining successful outcomes. The third section then forwards

¹⁸⁹ Bambaci, Saront, and Tommasi (2002, p. 85) conclude the same for the economic policy reform process in Argentina under Carlos Menem (1989–1999), and they recommend looking at the polity in order to explain policy reform outcomes. According to them, standard economic approaches are unable to do so.

four general observations about the part played by politics in steering the reform process successfully. These relate to the significant contributions of political leaders, the presence of a larger development agenda within which educational reform was being pursued in cases of success, the role of the local state and local oversight, and the missing role of legislatures and political parties both in cases of success and in its absence. The chapter's fourth section analyses the theoretical contributions made of my research, including suggestions for modification of what I perceive to be the current analytical biases in the study of the political dynamics of educational reform. I conclude with a reflection on the limits of my research, and suggestions regarding possible future directions for investigation.

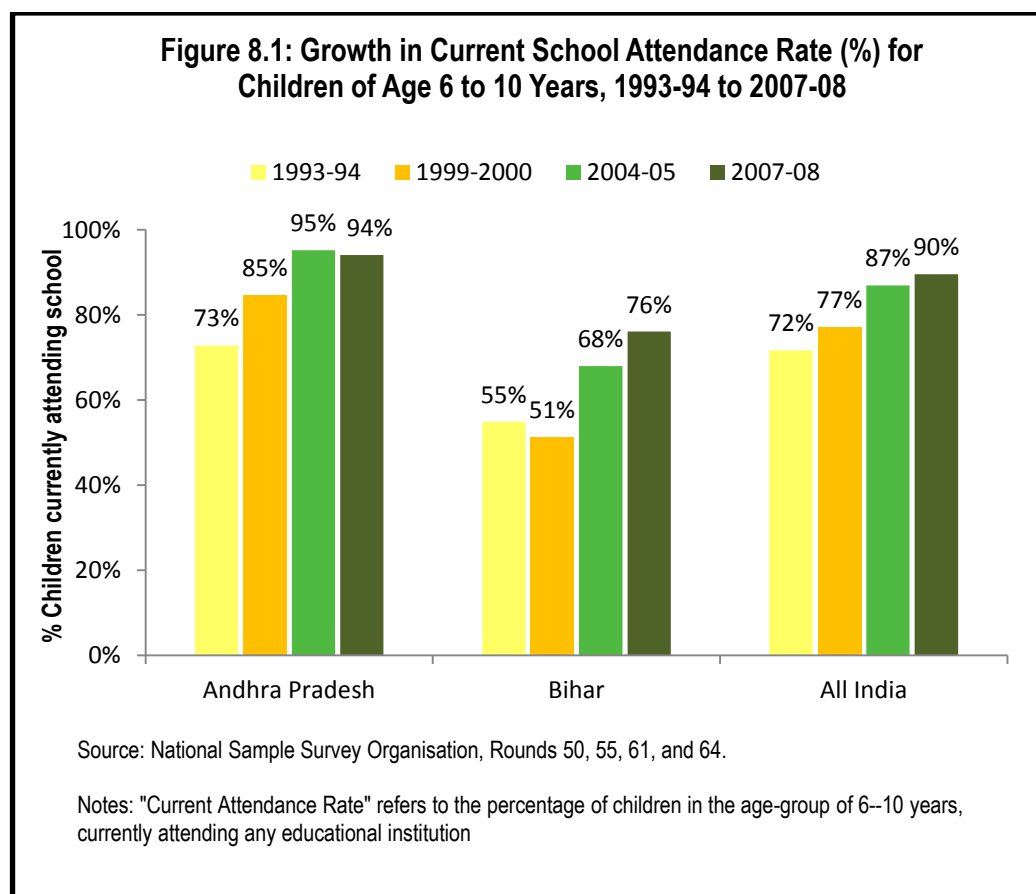
8.1 The Achievements of Two Decades of Educational Reform

Notwithstanding the contentious process of policy implementation, clearly much has changed for school education in India as a whole, and in the two states studied here. Indeed, things now appear to have changed even in the state of Bihar, where a reform minded political leadership has replaced the Rashtriya Janata Dal government under the leadership of Lalu Prasad Yadav at the end of 2005. For the new coalition government led by Nitish Kumar, reforming schools and improving the participation of disadvantaged social castes and girls has been an agenda of priority. In fact Kumar's re-election in the 2010 state Assembly elections has been widely credited to the efforts made under his leadership for pursuing a wider agenda of development, including reforms in school education.¹⁹⁰

Educational participation based on the National Sample Survey (NSS) data, the indicator of attainment used in Chapters 3 and 4, provides some

¹⁹⁰ Special efforts to bring in disadvantaged social castes to schools through residential bridge courses and incentives to girls by way of free uniforms and bicycles to encourage them to attend schools, were some of the main approaches of the new government in this regard. See Priyam (2011) for a discussion of some of these special efforts through residential bridge courses, and Priyam (2010) for a description of how the incentive schemes to bring girls to schools, along with a broader agenda for development, assisted the incumbent government in winning the 2010 state assembly elections.

evidence of these positive changes at the all-India level and in Bihar. Attendance rates for primary education at the national level have reached the mark of near universal participation, following an increase of 18 percentage points since the time that reforms began (in 1993–94). In AP the attendance rates for primary schools were put at 94 per cent in 2007–08—an increase of 21 percentage points since reforms began. In Bihar too there are signs of definite change with a participation rate of 76 per cent in 2007–08. This again is the result of an increase of nearly 21 percentage points since 1993–94. What makes Bihar’s efforts significant and unusual (and different from the national trends and those in AP), is that participation rates for primary schools initially showed a downward movement in the state. Following a dip in 1999–2000, the increase in participation rates for children of primary school- going age was nearly 25 percentage points—from 51 per cent in 1999–2000 to 76 per cent in 2007–08 (see Figure 8.1).



What is significant is that this increased participation is due to a reduction of the gaps in participation of the poor (especially in rural areas), of girls, and of disadvantaged social castes. In the 1990s, participation of the rural poor in Bihar was characterised by very low rates of school attendance and very high inequality between the rich and the poor.¹⁹¹ However, between 1999–2000 and 2007–08, the participation rates for the poorest strata of the rural population (represented by the bottom quintile in Tables 8.1a and 8.1b) increased from 31.6 to 65 per cent, and inequality in participation narrowed down by half. School participation in the state had also been characterised by wide gender differences that persisted during the 1990s. Here too there was a marked

¹⁹¹ The inequality in school participation has been arrived at on the basis of difference in participation rates of the richest and poorest 20 per cent of the population, calculated on the basis of monthly per capita consumption expenditure reported by the National Sample Survey Organisation. Participation rates for the 1990s are described in Chapter 4.

improvement, especially after 2004–05. The difference between the attendance rates for girls and boys which was nearly 16 percentage points in 1999–2000, fell to just 7 percentage points in 2007–08.

Meanwhile, AP, which had already reduced the gender differential in a significant way in the 1990s, demonstrated gender parity in its school participation rates by 2007–08. Socially disadvantaged castes also improved their participation. The low rates for STs and SCs seen in the early 1990s became a phenomenon of the past. In 2007–08, all social castes in AP reported school attendance rates of over 90 per cent. Bihar too made some improvement in this regard—the participation of disadvantaged social castes, the SCs and the OBCs, increased by 30 and 25 percentage points respectively between 1999–2000 and 2007–08 (see Tables 8.1a and 8.1b for a description of the socio-economic characteristics of school participation at the primary stage).

Research by others confirms that increase in school enrolment and in literacy rates are sure signs of progress (see Annual Status of Education Report 2010; Little 2010; Pritchett and Pande 2006). However, the major area of concern now appears to be the poor quality of learning, highlighted especially by the Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER).¹⁹² The learning achievement of children in government schools is an issue where there was little information until the end of 1990s. But with the regular publication of ASER reports on learning achievements, this critical deficiency is being filled and the deficits in this regard are highlighted regularly. However, “learning quality” too is not an uncontested notion and with scholars claiming that the current debate on quality has been overly concerned with “learning outcomes”, and “less with issues of reform of curriculum, pedagogy, textbooks, and role of teachers” (Little 2010, p. 43; Sarangapani 2010 p. 45, as cited in Little 2010, p. 43) the political dimensions of the debate about improving quality are beginning to emerge. Clearly, educational reform in India is poised to grapple with the new challenges posed by another stage of policy

¹⁹² The ASER reports have been put together since 2005 by the non-governmental organisation PRATHAM. They highlight basic reading and arithmetic abilities of children through a household survey. These can be accessed at: <http://www.asercentre.org/>

reform in education and the implementation of these efforts are likely to benefit from the lessons obtained from an earlier phase that I have assembled here.

I now move towards drawing general conclusions from the experience of political dynamics in specific arenas and localities.

Table 8.1 a: Selected Socio-Economic Indicators of Educational Participation at the Primary School Stage, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 1999-2000

State	Social Caste			Gender			Rural Areas		
	SC	OBC	Others	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Top quintile	Bottom quintile
Andhra Pradesh	85.4	83.3	91.7	84.6	81.7	87.3	82.6	86.2	74.2
Bihar	37.5	52.5	62.4	51.3	42.6	58.4	49.5	69.3	31.6

Source: National Sample Survey Organisation, Round 55th (schedule 10)

Notes: (i) "Primary Stage" refers to children in the age group 6-10 years, (ii) Current Attendance Rate: The Percent of Children Currently Attending Any Educational Institution (iii) SC-Scheduled Caste; OBC-Other Backward Castes; Others-all social castes excluding SC, ST, and OBC, (iv) Top quintile: Top 20% of all the individuals based on their monthly per capita household consumption expenditure, Bottom quintile: Bottom 20% of all the individuals based on their monthly per capita household consumption expenditure

Table 8.1 b: Selected Socio-Economic Indicators of Educational Participation at the Primary School Stage, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 2007-08

State	Social Caste			Gender			Rural Areas		
	SC	OBC	Others	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Top quintile	Bottom quintile
Andhra Pradesh	94.5	93.3	96.4	94.0	93.3	94.7	92.8	95.7	89.9
Bihar	67.5	77.0	85.5	76.1	72.3	79.0	75.5	82.2	65.0

Source: National Sample Survey Organisation, Round 55th(schedule 10)

Notes: (i) "Primary Stage" refers to children in the age group of 6-10 years, (ii) Current Attendance Rate: The percentage of children currently attending any educational institution (iii) SC-Scheduled Caste; OBC-Other Backward Castes; Others-all social castes excluding SC, ST, and OBC, (iv) Top quintile: Top 20 per cent of the individuals based on their monthly per capita household consumption expenditure, Bottom quintile: Bottom 20 per cent of all the individuals based on their monthly per capita household consumption expenditure

8.2 Lessons from Across the Arenas of Implementation

The process of educational policy change in the Indian federal framework has been a long one. It has developed through several phases of agenda setting, policy design and adaptation, and implementation at the local level. Each of these phases have involved interactions between political and policy actors, with varying interests in the policy process. Further, each of them have also served as distinct political arenas in their own right, with the outcomes of the contested process in each bearing upon the progress (or otherwise) of school reforms. I now describe this process for each specific arena, including observations about opportunities offered and the political responses to them.

Agenda Setting

At the stage of federal agenda setting, the political role of the Centre has been two-fold: first strategic decisions to manage political opposition, and second, offering new opportunities to state governments as an incentive for easy acceptance of the reform agenda. Also, at this stage the actions of political leaders have seemed to matter less than those of policymakers, especially of officers belonging to the line ministries of education and finance. Key decisions with respect to accepting structural adjustment loans to resolve India's balance-of-payments crisis of 1991 were indeed political decisions. However, the technical details were finalised by the finance ministry, including the decision to borrow from the World Bank for primary education reforms in the country. The technical design of educational reform remained the responsibility of the Department of Education (DoE) in Delhi. The two key challenges before the design team were (i) negotiating the entry of the World Bank with minimum political opposition, especially from the left-leaning political parties, and (ii) getting the state governments, whose responsibility it was to implement the changes, to accept the reform programme.

Anticipating these challenges by federal policymakers helped. Strategic choices were made by the Centre in order to manage possible opposition. To handle the challenge of negotiating the World Bank's entry in the primary education sector with

minimum political opposition, two key strategic choices were made—first, making the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) a multi-donor programme, and not a reform programme identified solely with the World Bank. And second, the government did not accept interference from the Bank and other donors in designing the DPEP. This toning down of the identification of the reform programme with the World Bank was also an element which contributed to the DPEP's easy acceptance by state governments—indeed even Kerala, where the left-front was a dominant political player, became one of the states where the DPEP was accepted for implementation.

As far as the states are concerned, the programme design offered them several opportunities which aligned with their own interests. This was an important reason why the DPEP, and following it the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, were easily accepted by the state governments. The opportunities included the transfer of a larger volume of federal resources to states on easy terms, and for investment in building new capacity at a time when the states themselves were severely constrained in terms of resources. Teacher unions were not consulted at the stage of federal design. And federal institutions such as the Department of Education actually facilitated the change process (and did not act as a constraining force as noticed by scholars working on economic policy reform—as for e.g. see Sinha, 2003) or as expected from the postulates of new political economy. Further, federal design of reforms also set up new institutions at the state level and mobilised experts who could provide critical ideas for change. These were to form the new allies or support groups for the reform process.

Managing opposing interests and biased institutions was a real challenge at the state level, in contrast to what we saw at the Centre. Challenges from opposing interests and biased institutions needed to be overcome for reforms to find their feet. The line departments of education at the state level were truly an impediment to reforms, in contrast to the “facilitating” role of the same department at the federal level. The activity of the state departments of education was limited to paying salaries for the large number of teachers who were serving as government employees following measures of centralisation, and handling the grievances of teachers which were often taken to the

courts. The state departments lacked the ideas, resources, and indeed the very motivation to change things. Additional institutional constraints came from the norms of the state treasury, which did not easily permit spending on innovations. At the state level, therefore, institutions preferred status-quo over change. Here, the technical design of reforms provided some opportunity—the new institution of the “society” (discussed in Chapter 3) allowed the transfer of funds directly from the Centre to the states, so bypassing some of the institutional constraints of the state departments of education and the treasury.

With regard to the anticipated opposition from teacher unions, federal policymakers showed skills in not making any explicit recommendations on taking “hard measures” for teachers, leaving it to the discretion of implementing states. So, the federal agenda setting process was characterised by political skills of aligning new opportunities towards interests of state governments, and introducing reforms by a type of “stealth” (that is reducing the association with the World Bank by making reform policies multi-donor financed and domestically designed) and keeping political opposition from left parties and the state governments at bay.¹⁹³ The few instances of resistance on issues such as changes in teacher recruitment policies in Madhya Pradesh, and on the revision of textbooks as in the case of Kerala, were limited to the states and never gathered the momentum of a “national” level opposition.¹⁹⁴ In this, the federal division of institutional power between the Centre and the states helped the situation—the Centre was limited to designing policy guidelines and it was the responsibility of the states to implement change.

Interest Management

In many ways, the findings of how teachers and their unions were managed during the reform process in both AP and Bihar did not conform to the image of vote-seeking

¹⁹³ Jenkins (1999, pp. 5–6, 47) notes that a similar process characterised the introduction of economic policy reforms in India. Political opposition to these policies did not materialise as expected, because political skills were used to blunt the opposition and a strategy of “reform by stealth” was pursued.

¹⁹⁴ See Leclercq (2002) and Sharma (1999) for a description of state-level opposition to reforms in teacher recruitment in Madhya Pradesh; Husock, Moore, and Orren (2000) describe the political resistance from teacher unions and political parties to changes made in textbooks in Kerala.

politicians colluding with rent-seeking unions, and resisting change, put forward by proponents of formal political economy theory.

In Andhra Pradesh, the state followed a consistent policy (from 1998 on) of reducing opportunities for discretion and the use of arbitrary authority with respect to the transfers and postings of teachers. The direction of these policies persisted, notwithstanding the change of government in 2004.¹⁹⁵ In making these changes the state not only put an end to the opportunities for political patronage and rent-seeking in transfers and postings, but it also won over the loyalty of teachers. This, along with the opening of new avenues for promotion at the *mandal* level, and the unification of two different cadres of teachers, further aligned policy actions with teachers' interests.¹⁹⁶

Political skills were also evident in the manner in which the state of AP dealt with teachers' unions—that is playing on inter-union rivalries and pitting the Government Teachers' Association against the *Panchayati Raj* Teachers' Union. The government granted concessions to the latter union (which commanded the support of the largest number of primary school teachers in the state). This government support to the *Panchayati Raj* Teachers' Union left it with little option than to provide tacit support for government policies. For other reasons too the unions did not really have the choice to oppose the government that was in power—their command over teachers depended on how skilfully they could negotiate with the government and extract concessions. Otherwise, they ran the risk of losing their members to rival unions. Both the divide-and-rule strategies and compulsions for cooperation among unions blunted the expected opposition from the organised collective action of teachers. In its dealings with teachers

¹⁹⁵ I have noted the last set of specific instructions issued by the Government of Andhra Pradesh in the year 2011 (GoAP 2011b, G.O. Number 65, 19 May) for reducing discretion in transfers and postings in Chapter 5.

¹⁹⁶ Reducing discretion in teacher transfers and postings did not mean that opportunities for bribes, corruption, and political patronage were completely abolished. On the contrary observers note that there were opportunities of rent-seeking and patronage in other areas, including transfers in government departments. Writings of scholars like Manor (2002 p. 17), Mooij (2007 p. 44), Suri (2004 p. 5497) make a mention of these. My own research also takes note of the new opportunities for political patronage opened up by “selection” of chairmen of school committees. These were TDP loyalists, and were awarded contracts for the building of schools.

and their unions, the actions of political leaders displayed a series of concessions in terms of the content of policies and their appropriate timing and sequencing.

Local strategies of union-reform cooperation—witnessed in East Godavari where former office bearers of the left-leaning State Teachers' Union (STU) became officers of the district reform team—were pointers to the highly context specific and embedded ways in which the political dynamics of reform implementation played out in practice. While ideologically the union was opposed to World Bank funding, its rivalry with the strong ultra-left local groups in the region, and the threat of “sitting out” while school reforms were being implemented (that is, if the STU followed a dogmatic ideological position), forced it to follow a pragmatic line on externally financed reforms.¹⁹⁷ The STU also used its official position in the reform team to resolve teacher grievances at the District Education Officer's (DEO's) level—another example of using the opportunities given by reforms to advance its own interest as a union (by taking up issues related to teachers, and winning their loyalty).

In Bihar, the strategy of confrontation with the unions, and other institutional actors such as the judiciary, proved detrimental to implementing the reform agenda. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) government, under the political leadership of Lalu Prasad Yadav, accused the main union—the *Bihar Rajya Prathamik Shikshak Sangh*, of partisan affiliation with the rival Congress Party and of being dominated by the upper castes.¹⁹⁸ This attack was meant to send a message to the RJD voters (who were largely from backward castes) that the poor quality of schools (and indeed a general lack of development and extensive poverty in the state) was due to the domination of partisan and upper caste affiliations of state institutions. However, having made this critique the RJD government failed to pursue an alternate agenda of development, and strictures from the judiciary forced it to abandon the policy reform it intended to follow. This preference for an approach of confrontation over negotiations, making use of skills and

¹⁹⁷ I have noted in Chapter 5 that the STU was backed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Jenkins (1999p. 64) also observes this in the case of economic policy reforms—they received tacit, followed by “more explicit” backing from left-leaning and communist parties which ruled many Indian states.

¹⁹⁸ The Congress had been the main ruling party in the state before the Rashtriya Janata Dal came to power in early 1990.

strategy, resulted in a lack of support for reforms among institutions as well as teachers. This, coupled with the overall context of weak governance in the state, resulted in an inability to implement even technically well-designed measures.

The contrasting approaches towards and outcomes of state action with respect to teacher policies in the two states—strengthening centralisation in AP and reversing it in favour of decentralised recruitment in Bihar—also shows that there are no easy answers with respect to either direction of policy. Centralised policies worked in AP under conditions of reducing discretion and the arbitrary use of authority, evolving detailed rules of procedure over time to sustain these changes, and changing the attitudes of district and sub-district level officers. On the issue of changing the attitude of district and sub-district officers, the gains were limited and further progress needs to be made. This is evident from the persisting grievances amongst teachers in Mahabubnagar regarding large-scale transfers in the district, and the consistent need for state action in issuing detailed instructions for narrowing discretion in teacher policies.

Decentralised recruitments did not work in Bihar in the first instance, when para-teachers known as *Panchayat Shiksha Mitras* were recruited in large numbers in 2002. There were many charges of corruption and poor quality of recruitment, and the policy was challenged in court. In the second instance, the decentralised recruitment of teachers worked after strategic retreats were made by the new government in 2006, and institutional conflicts with the court and the union *Berozgaar Shikshak Sangh* had been negotiated. These new decentralised recruitment rules also needed support from the state for sustained implementation, which was very similar to the support given to centralised recruitment rules in AP. Decentralisation in no way means the end of policy challenges—these are simply pushed down to a lower level and new forms of responsible state action are required in order to sustain these policy changes.

The role of the political leadership and the local context for reform implementation are fore-grounded in the political dynamics witnessed in this arena. In Andhra Pradesh, Naidu's political skills were demonstrated in sustaining policy changes, authorising bureaucrats to act, and in manoeuvring the unions. On the other hand, it was

not the strength of opposing interests as much as a strategy of confrontation, especially with institutions pursued by the government, which was the cause of sharp reversals and even abandonment of policies in Bihar. Under these circumstances, it did appear that impediments posed by vested interests and institutions were resisting change in the state, a belief that the political leadership itself held and propagated.

Decentralisation and Community Mobilisation

Political motivation in this arena of policy change is in complete contrast to what I noticed apropos teacher policies in AP. While reducing discretion and patronage characterised the policy changes with respect to teachers in the state, the new community initiatives with respect to decentralisation and community participation in AP were intended to build a network of influence around the party leader by distributing patronage among new actors. The school committees were also meant to undercut the status of *panchayats* which were the new institutions of political decentralisation, directly elected by the people. The school committees were very much like the user committees established by Naidu for other development sectors in the state, and they underscored the insecurity that political leaders like him anticipated from competitive politics at the local level.

The intended “centralised” objectives of policy were achieved by effective implementation and strong control of the line department of education over school committees. The actions of *mandal* education officers and head masters in selecting chairpersons with strong partisan affiliations to the ruling TDP party highlighted that the bureaucracy was effectively used for political purposes, whenever required. Besides, the claims of community participation were more a rhetoric than reality—members did not know their role, seldom deliberated on issues of significance, and simply authorised decisions taken by the headmaster. When I look at the political dynamics of policy changes in both arenas together, I find considerable merit in Mooij’s (2007) argument that Naidu’s efforts at reform implementation were marked by both “political skills and much hype”. The former was employed by the political leader to manoeuvre political support and the latter to create a distinct image of Naidu as a new type of “leader”

moulded as a technical manager, efficient in implementing the neo-liberal model of economic development.

The partisan affiliations of the committees, and more specifically of their Chairs, meant that there were changes to the technical design with a change in government. But these changes did not alter the basic direction of Naidu's model of "centralised" decentralisation for schools, or of political control being extended over them. The changes that the new Chief Minister Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy of the Congress Party made in AP were largely symbolic, signalling a change from Naidu's style of personalised control and simply adding some more political actors to the list of those who were to be the "masters" of these committees. The changes did not deepen the electoral or participatory features of design, or grant them any real powers or resources.

Bihar is a case in contrast. Here, the lack of effective implementation led to the weak institutionalisation of a technically well designed policy for school decentralisation. Important elements of technical design were the envisaged direct elections for school committees and devolution of some real powers of effective community control over teachers. Neither of these policy intentions could be realised in practice due to local elite capture and the collusion of authorities of the local state. The state's political leadership remained indifferent to these dynamics of local politics. Subsequent changes to school committees, especially after 2006, placed emphasis on strengthening their election process, bringing it under the regulatory control of the state election commission (which was widely considered to be an autonomous and fair body, possessing wide powers for punitive action in case authorities were found to be subverting the electoral process).

The lack of supportive action from the state and non-responsive local authorities created an impression of "less state" and a trust deficit at the local level. Even though the poor knew that they could complain against errant teachers, unscheduled closure of schools, and irregular service of very poor quality mid-day meals, they did not use these powers. They were sure they would not be heard by the authorities. Thus, these

measures of decentralisation in Bihar remained the actions of reform minded bureaucrats, without the support of the political leadership.

Two observations with respect to the changes in teacher policies and decentralisation highlight the effects of “policy feedback”—a concept which has been given considerable emphasis in the literature on comparative institutionalism.¹⁹⁹ In teacher policies as much as those related to school decentralisation, both AP and Bihar persisted with certain basic tenets of policy, notwithstanding changes in government. Centralised control over teacher policies and school committees continued to be the main aspects of changed policy design in AP, while in Bihar the changes were characterised more by an enhanced emphasis on decentralisation—in teacher policies, and in the augmentation of local control over schools. In both cases, it seems that policy changes, once initiated are difficult to reverse, and enhance government capabilities in a manner in which they guide the possibilities for future official initiatives.

Schools and Local Politics

The claims of “success” in AP appeared far more modest when I viewed results from the ground—from the working of schools, and from the perspective of communities. Notwithstanding the reforms of teacher policies, there were instances of administrative power being used in an arbitrary manner over teachers by district authorities, even though the *Mandal* Education Officers and the reform team were often prepared to mediate on their behalf. There were attitudinal problems among teachers as well—especially in Mahabubnagar district where a rapport between teachers and students was missing in several of the schools observed. The actual attendance of children in schools was lower than what was showed in “official” records and teachers hid the real reason why children were absent. In other instances, teachers simply huddled together and did not work, leaving the entire responsibility of teaching on the shoulders of the para-teachers.

¹⁹⁹ See Ikenberry (1994 pp. 23–24) for a discussion on how resolution of policy struggles at one moment has an impact on institutional settings and interests and capabilities of groups and individuals.

However, compared to Bihar, government schools seemed to be working much better in AP. The mid-day meals were of good quality and were provided regularly, the actual presence of children in school was much higher, and parents had fewer complaints against teachers. Higher school attendance by children, but more than that the better presence of teachers was helped in a major way by the presence of better roads and public transport facilities in the state. In contrast, a lack of such facilities abetted the irregular presence of teachers in Bihar. These considerations are also indicative of the support extended to improving schools from other elements of the development agenda. Interestingly, building better roads has been high on the agenda of the new government in Bihar. In an earlier section, I have highlighted the achievements of the new government in improving primary school participation.²⁰⁰

In Andhra Pradesh, administrative changes made in the past, especially the creation of *mandals*, has been of help in implementing school reform measures on the ground. Here, the local state seems to have greater administrative capability and responsiveness as compared to Bihar. The *Mandal* Education Officers in AP had a far smaller number of schools and teachers to supervise and were not antagonistic to the teachers, unlike what I noticed to be the case with the Block Education Officers (BEOs) in Bihar. Besides, the MEOs, the Mandal Resource Persons (MRPs) employed in his/her office also visited the schools regularly. This was a contrast to the BEOs in Bihar, many of whom could not recollect when they had last visited the schools. In fact, the educational reform efforts in AP can be said to have had an “unanticipated benefit” from this pre-existing structure, increasing the capacity of the local state, another example of policy feedback highlighted in comparative-institutional literature on the policy reform process.

In contrast, the BEOs in Bihar were noted to be “anti- reform”—a community of government officers, unresponsive to the community, antagonistic to the interests of the teachers, and having very little links to the schools. They were seen as non-responsive

²⁰⁰ See Priyam (2010) on the political benefits that accrued to the Nitish Kumar government from building better roads in the state.

by both the teachers and the community in Bihar. Policy entrepreneurs in the state saw the BEO as an instrument of rent extraction from teachers. Accordingly, decentralisation related reforms in the state were backed by policy entrepreneurs to reverse the control of BEOs and district educational authorities on teachers. Community control was seen by them as a counter to centralised control. For lack of political support, the first round of policy changes could not be implemented.

Besides, the merging of two distinct chains of command from the “top” at the *mandal* level—from the line department of education as well as the reform team—implied convergent implementation, and reform initiatives did not run “parallel” to or as a substitute for departmental initiatives. In Bihar, reform initiatives and departmental policies ran on parallel tracks almost until 2006. Only after this year can the effects of support from a new political leadership for the initiatives made by policy-entrepreneurs were to be seen especially in the area of strategic negotiations over teacher policies. I also infer from this that while the presence of policy experts and policy-entrepreneurs located in the reform team outside the government’s department of education was a necessary condition for initiating policy changes it was by itself not sufficient for the consolidation of change.

Merging of the implementation of new reform ideas and initiatives alongside institutions such as the line department of education, considered to be inclined towards old policies and ideas, was another element of strategic negotiation of the reform process in AP. In theory such institutions are viewed only as opponents of change. Following a change in political leadership in Bihar in 2005, growth oriented policy reforms have been pursued more vigorously and education policy changes are being seen as a critical element of the broader agenda of development. The regressive role of officers of the local state—the district and block level offices of the education department—has been recognised as a matter of policy concern in the state. That said, policy action on this issue has been introduced slowly, and only after the government had consolidated its political base in the Assembly elections of 2010.

The new administrative reforms put in place by the government of Bihar in 2011 have abolished the post of the “district superintendant of education”—an office known to have no links with the academic life of schools, and disliked by teachers and the community alike for its potential to extract rents from each of them. Besides, the new changes have added programme related functionaries in the district education office. With these changes the isolation of educational reform by the line department of education in the state comes to an end even in Bihar, and administrative procedures in this state have become similar to what I have noted in AP—integration of the reform team with line department of education and a more responsive sub-district administration. The recent reforms in district and sub-district structures of educational administration in Bihar are indicative that the government understands that reforms in the structure of the local state are important if educational reform has to find a toe-hold on the ground (GoB 2011b). Also, it elucidates the slow and evolutionary nature of changes that characterise the policy reform process in education, involving various levels of a complex federal system, in contrast to economic policy reforms which can be brought about more swiftly by “stroke of the pen” decisions.

8.3 The Process of Politics: Leadership Matters

Reducing patronage in some areas of policy and building new networks of political influence in others, it was political skills that Naidu used to steer the agenda of reforms in AP. While technical design did have an impact in terms of the substance of change, of greater significance to the outcomes was the signalling effect of the political leader. Naidu’s clear association with the reform process sent a message to the multi-layered administrative machinery responsible for implementing reform programmes. Policy entrepreneurs made strategic use of this opportunity to negotiate institutional change, get things moving across multiple bureaucracies, and secure political authorisation for policy level changes. The timing of policy changes and the sequencing of each policy intervention were critical aspects of the efforts made by leaders. The absence of such an

association of the political leader with reforms in Bihar meant that no amount of efforts at the design and policy level was able to steer change or sustain innovation.

The Role of Political Leaders

In many ways the comparative success of the reform process in AP and the lack of it in Bihar, points to the role of leadership as a determinant of the variations in outcome. This conclusion is in conformity with what scholars have noted for the economic policy reform process (Wallis 1999; Williamson 1994). In guiding teacher policies, exercising authoritative control over school committees and the decentralisation process, putting implementing bureaucrats in line, and in building a coalition of support for reform through these changes, Naidu made abundant use of political skills. His style indeed was one focused on portraying him at the centre of all the changes, making it appear as if it were his “personality traits” that were responsible for these policy changes. However, as Wallis (1999, p.40) notes, this gives only a partial understanding of the role of leadership in the policy reform process, one that lays emphasis only on the supply-side, as it were. She notes that there is in addition the need to understand the “situational factors” which give these leaders the opportunity to exercise their leadership.

If personality traits and charisma were the only characteristics that mattered, then I argue that in the case of Bihar too there were many favourable political conditions which were pointers to the possibility of a strong reform leadership emerging under Lalu Prasad Yadav. He too was portrayed as a political leader with charisma, and the support of political circumstances in terms of a strong mandate, and faced by a weak opposition. Both have been identified as supportive political conditions for the adoption of policy reforms (Wallis 1999 p. 41, Williamson and Haggard 1994 pp. 571-77). Lalu Prasad Yadav was quick to identify the Congress Party with earlier policy failures and for its association with vested interests, signalling that his government was capable of taking on vested interests and exercising autonomous policy-leadership. Indeed, his early pronouncements about the *charwaha vidyalay*—a non-formal school for shepherd boys usually belonging to the lower castes built “hype” around his leadership, in much the same way that Jos Mooij (2007) describes for Naidu in AP. Nevertheless, weak

implementation became a characteristic of all policy measures initiated under his leadership, and indeed of his general style of governance.²⁰¹

The fact that a new government in Bihar, led by Nitish Kumar, could pursue an agenda of educational reform was indicative that structural constraints and vested interests were not insurmountable. A consistent, visionary, and unconstrained authoritative leadership was important for successful reforms. But also crucial were negotiations over policy. In many ways, Nitish Kumar was doing in Bihar what Naidu did in AP a term earlier, although without emphasis on “personality” that was characteristic of Naidu’s rule in AP.²⁰² The new government in Bihar began to use federal opportunities aligning them with the interests of the state.

The Role of Experts: Policy-Entrepreneurship in Educational Reform

In addition to the political leaders, an “informal network” of bureaucrats—with experience in implementing the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Programme, the Bihar Education Programme, and the District Primary Education Programme—were important in steering the reforms in both states. These policy entrepreneurs were generally officers of the Indian Administrative Service, who either led the reform team at the state level or were posted in the line ministry (of education) at the federal level, and gained considerable exposure to global ideas as also experience in reform implementation. These officers were well-versed with the institutional structure of the line departments and they helped the process of negotiating around institutional impediments.

²⁰¹ See World Bank (2005) for a description of the critical bottlenecks and failures in governance at the end of the decade long rule of the RJD in the state. See Sinha (1995) for a description of the failure of his innovative scheme of *charwaha vidyalay*. See Hauser (1997) for a discussion of Lalu Yadav’s failures in the implementation of other populist schemes announced by him.

²⁰² The publicity around Naidu’s leadership promoted the belief that policy reforms were the result of some personality traits or charisma borne in the person of the leader. These claims were contested by political observers, and indeed by Naidu’s own actions in different policy arenas. Policy actions under Nitish Kumar’s leadership come close to the ideal type of the “coherent policy leader” as described by Wallis (1999 p. 42)

Further, many acts of policy entrepreneurship, such as the school decentralisation legislation in Bihar, were the result of their efforts.²⁰³ Indeed the endeavours of political leaders would not have been successful if this trained cadre of policy experts were not available in the states.

However, no instances of policy entrepreneurship by the officers would have worked on their own, without the backing of the political leader. While AP offered almost no instances of reform champions acting on their own, Bihar had many examples of “entrepreneur” like activities from policymakers, in designing new policies seeking legislative authorisation, yet absence of political support proved to be a critical deficiency in sustaining these changes.

In terms of the stages of reforms, what can be seen is that while actions of policy entrepreneurs are important in agenda setting and turning policy design into an implementable framework, it is political leaders who matter in terms of how reforms are implemented (rather than how they are designed).

Pursuing Educational Reform within a Broader Agenda for Development

An important incentive for Naidu’s efforts in improving primary schools, and thereafter for Nitish Kumar was that both men saw these changes as linked to broader development goals. Thus, they pursued a wider vision of development of which education was a part. Naidu’s idea of pursuing a path of economic growth through globalisation and liberalisation articulated the need for a globally competitive, literate AP as an essential element. Literature on educational policy reform from other countries too confirms this observation (about greater chances of success when pursued along with a broader development agenda).²⁰⁴ But an important caveat here is that AP and Bihar are sub-national units, not completely free in their choices and institutions—they both act within a federal framework.

²⁰³ In AP, the notable officers were the late Nagarjuna, (State Project Director for DPEP), and I.V. Subba Rao (Secretary, Education for the GoAP). In Bihar, the notable reform leaders were the late M.M. Jha (State Project Director for BEP, who later became Education Secretary in Nitish Kumar’s government), Vijay Raghavan (State Project Director for BEP), and Anjani Kumar Singh (State Project Director for BEP, and current Education Secretary of the Government of Bihar).

²⁰⁴ Draibe (2004) for example, analyses the case of educational reform in Brazil pursued under the Cardoso administration’s wider agenda for development.

Missing Voices: Legislature, Party, and Politicians on the Side-lines

In Andhra Pradesh, key political leaders such as elected representatives for the federal parliament or state assembly (known as ‘Member of Parliament’ and ‘Member of Legislative Assembly’ respectively), and other party leaders were on the fringe of the reform process. The new political opportunities opened up by reforms held no appeal to political actors other than the Chief Minister. This applied even within the party in power. The local legislators were not associated with or interested in these changes in either AP or Bihar. The process of legislative authorisation for school committees did not alter the situation in any way, as a strong majority of ruling parties in both states and the emphasis on the “leader” within these parties, did not leave any agency with legislators.

Local State and Local Oversight

Politics understood as the actions of the political leader at the macro-level alone does not explain the full ambit of what I have argued is its dynamic relationship with educational reform. The significance of a political leader diminishes somewhat at the local level. How people accept change or participate in the efforts for change is ultimately explained more in relation to the working of the local state. Functionaries of the state at the “frontline” of service delivery in both the states very often excluded the poor through their attitude or worked as a part of a rent extracting mechanism. The exclusion of the poor was the result of a variety of micro-processes that characterised the “governance” of schooling and worked to keep the poor out of school affairs.

The non-participation of the poor in Bihar schools does not seem to be simply apathy. Rather, it constitutes an active rejection of a local system where poor people felt that their complaints were not heard. In the grievances of the people that I have reported, complaints about the high handed attitude of teachers, their irregularity, and their assertion of power as government servants are many. From the observations on school committee elections and functioning, and on the working of schools, there seems to be a far greater control of vested interests at the local level in Bihar than in AP. The role of

institutions and interests in blocking change seemed real at this level. The inability of the “central” state to intervene on behalf of the poor made matters worse and led to a deep distrust of the state among the poor.

Emergence of local political competition from *panchayats*—the institutions of political decentralisation— was a challenge to the authority of “new” political leaders pursuing the agenda of educational reform alongside a broader agenda of development. How they would negotiate this new political competition from below, would provide analysts with greater insights on motivations of leaders and help unravel the “hype” or packaging of reforms from its real intentions.

8.4 Contributions and Future Directions

Contributions

While I have found limitations of the explanatory potential of formal political economy approaches in understanding the political dynamics of education policy reforms, I do recognize that this approach makes important contributions—especially in providing the framework within which the challenges to the policy reform process can be understood. I too have used the framework as one of “first principles” and organized my thoughts around it. Moreover, I find that its description of there being vested interest around the policy-process does have a strong empirical referent. However, that said, the weakness of the political economy approach lies in its inability to explain how or why policy change does in fact happen. Here, I agree with the observations of Jenkins that “new-political-economy approaches are at times helpful in framing research questions, but tend to systematically discount the incentives facing governing elites to take limited risks, as well as the capacity for interest groups themselves to respond to new incentives...” (Jenkins 1999, p.7)

One of the contributions of this research relates to modifying the analytical biases relating to the constraining role of strong interests in society, and advancing the understanding about the role of “agency” in the process of change. Leadership acts with greater autonomy from the control of either structures or interests than current assumptions in theory. This autonomy of action can be seen in the timing and content of

new policies—as seen in the skilful use of new opportunities, and in negotiating the process of change.

Further, it contributes to the limited body of knowledge on the policy reform process in the social sector by comparing similar cases for variations in outcomes, located within a common federal democratic context. The results I have underline the differences of dynamics between the “first generation” of policy reforms involving changes in economic policies, and the “second generation” of policy reforms involving changes in the social sector. In the latter case, a series of complex and discrete policy changes are needed to sustain the reform process; the state needs to play a more active role in this arena of change; and skills of negotiation have greater relevance as a longer time-span is required to implement and consolidate new policies.

Limitations of This Research

The limitations of this research stem from the aspects of policy initiative and political action that it has not been able to observe, and from aspects that it has been able observe but not explain fully. Three important aspects of state action that I have not been able to observe are interventions for improving the quality of learning, strategies to better the welfare of disadvantaged social castes, and other programmes for poverty alleviation. Educational reform made some significant interventions to improve the quality of teaching—for example, in teacher training and in improving textbooks. Although I noticed that the quality of teaching and even learning, was better in AP than in Bihar, considerations of how much the learning quality of children improved lie outside the scope of my research.

Also, reduction in gender and social disparities was a notable outcome of reform efforts. Indeed the data I have presented on school participation reflect these gains. Besides community mobilisation and improvement in formal schools (the aspects that I have seen and discussed here), a range of initiatives led by line ministries other than education, contributed significantly in reducing these disparities. However, since my observations were limited to policy actions initiated by the line department of education and the reform team, these were also outside the scope of my research.

How people related to schools and to the local state more generally, was also dependant on the efficiency and transparency with which a range of other development schemes worked in the state, especially those related to poverty alleviation. As Corbridge, Williams, Srivastav, and Veron (2005, pp.252–55) note outcomes such as participation in school committees or people’s interactions with schools and teachers, are only one aspect of the relationship between the state and its poor citizens in the local context. The full nature of this relationship depends on how the functionaries of the local state work in implementing other development schemes, and on how much the state is trusted by the poor in making goods and services available to them in a reasonably efficient and impartial manner. Research studies which focus on the working of the local state, and the impact this has on participation in schools by children and communities, is a recommended area for further research.

Because I have focused on the working of government schools, I have not evaluated how much of the progress in AP may be due to the growth of low cost private schools. This subject is gaining significance in research and policy discussions, especially since the publication of Tooley’s (2009) book on the existence of low cost private schools in the suburbs of Hyderabad, and findings of high—nearly 22 per cent enrolment of 6–14 year olds in private school in rural areas of India (ASER 2010). I have noted parents’ claims that private schools are better than government schools in discussions reported in Chapters 6 and 7. However, two caveats are in order here—the figures for participation in private schools do not in any way reduce the significance of my conclusions with respect to the political dynamics of government institutions. Second, for Tooley (2010) the enrolment figures for private schools and their low costs as compared to government schools, form the basis for arguing for “exit” options for the poor by way of giving them school vouchers, with which the poor can choose the school their children attend. Arguably, this may be another area of contested policy deliberation, but normatively it does not absolve the state of its responsibility to provide good quality schools for its poor citizens.

Among those aspects that I have observed, but have not fully explained is the issue of leadership motivation. Although my research identifies leadership action especially that of the political leader as a key determinant of policy outcomes, it does not propose a deeper explanation of what motivates leaders to pursue such change. Explanations based in economic theories of rational self-interest are inclined to argue that electoral advantages for themselves or their parties are the key motivation for leaders. However, there is abundant evidence from the cases I have analysed that not all the changes pursued can be explained on the basis of this logic alone. Thus, policy decisions related to reducing discretion in teacher policies in AP represent some degree of “autonomy” from calculations of political advantage. Also, in the policy measures where political advantage was expected to accrue, for example in building local party cadres through school education committees, the outcomes did not conform to these expectations, in the sense that school committee chairpersons were not significant actors at the time of elections. Besides, the literature points towards Naidu alienating many in his own party through the “reform” policies that he pursued (Suri 2004). And opportunities for political patronage were rife in sectors other than education (Manor 2002; Mooij 2007).

There are limitations also on the extent to which the findings and conclusions here can be generalised and the extent to which they can be used to predict what may happen in other democratic contexts. Here it is important to note that a significant aspect of the inference I draw from the comparison of AP and Bihar, is about the relevance of context and the locally embedded ways in which reforms unfold. Agents matter for change to take place, yet their skills are a response to the specificities of the context.

This research shows that relying on “global lessons” or applying “good practice” models from other contexts, is fraught with difficulty. We have seen that even within India, within a programme operating according to national guidelines and criteria, two states adopted radically different paths. The unintended consequences of policies with respect to decentralisation, especially their adaptation for different contexts and motivations further underscores the importance of appreciating the local contexts,

shaped by the contests of ideas and interests. Furthermore, the continuous adaptation of reform during implementation should not only be expected, but accepted as being the norm. Hence, the approach of designing the “perfect technical reform” to be implemented in a top down manner should be eschewed.

Future Directions

Suggestions on the way forward—on what can specifically be done with respect to improving schools, teacher policies, decentralisation and state-citizen relationships at the local level—derive from some of the observations of achievements and deficits in AP and Bihar, and especially from the pursuit of change “despite the odds” since a new government has stabilised its rule in Bihar. The fact that the state is now able to pursue a path of policy change in order to improve its schools indicates that the constraints of political structures and those of inherited institutions and interests are not insurmountable. In short, political leadership continues to be critical in navigating the path of policy change.

Proposals to bring about improved directions for future policies—especially those which aim to improve the quality of teaching and learning—include persisting with efforts to improve school-community relations, the need for improving teacher attitudes even in cases of “success”, and reforms in district and sub-district administration—the *mandal* and the block in AP and Bihar respectively. Of course, these critical endeavours are unlikely to be achieved as local pursuits and they need responsible support from the central leadership.

Accordingly, developing better theories to understand leadership motivations in the context of developing countries, where interests are weakly articulated and party-political competition is fluid and fragmented, remains a challenge. Some of the nuanced political circumstances that need to be addressed include the increasing competition arising from the presence of regional (in contrast to national parties) and of the enhanced local competition due to increasing political decentralisation. Of course empirical observations from more cases regarding how political leaders strategically negotiate the reform process and find new incentives and allies in the course of pursuing changes,

including case-comparisons from other Indian states, will be an aid to both endeavours, of new policy as well as theory.

In conclusion, I quote Geddes (1995 p.214) regarding the requirement to build theories where empirical observations of success, policy adaptation, and unintended consequences no longer appear anomalous. In this context, she states: "...politicians, their interest, and the political circumstances that shape the ways in which they pursue their interests. This is the research frontier. It is from these theories that a new paradigm will emerge."

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Research Methods Appendix

This research uses a variety of primary and secondary data sources in order to understand the complexities of implementation educational reform in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. The primary data sources include interviews with education policymakers and policy implementers, teachers and their unions, school and household surveys in selected sub-district units, and focus group discussions with school education committee members on the working of educational decentralisation. The secondary data sources include an analysis of national policies on education reform for nearly two decades (1990–2009), budgetary resources for education of the Centre and the states (from 1990–2007 to 2008), and data on educational participation provided by the National Sample Survey (from 1993–94 to 2007–08).

The tools used are both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative tools include interviews and focus group discussions. Quantitative tools include an analysis of budgetary data for school education, National Sample Survey data on educational participation, and school and household surveys in two selected districts in each state. Table 1 lists the data sources for Chapters 3–7.

Table 1: Data Sources by Chapter

Chapter No.	Chapter Title	Data Sources
Chapter 3	Setting the Agenda: The Federal Context of Educational Reform in India	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Government of India's education policy and programme documents 1990–2009. 2. Analysis of the budgetary resources for education, Central and state governments, 1990–91 to 2006–07. 3. Interviews with policymakers and experts. 4. Research literature, including reports commissioned by donor agencies on school education reform programmes in the 1990s.
Chapter 4	Federal Opportunities, State-level Implementation: The Puzzle of Contrasting Outcomes in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research literature on the political context of implementation of educational reform in the two states. 2. Programme guidelines and evaluation documents for the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Programme and the Bihar Education Programme. 3. Interviews with policymakers and experts. 4. Analysis of data on educational participation provided by the National Sample Survey, 1993–94 to 2007–08.

Table 1(continued)		
Chapter No.	Chapter Title	Data Sources
Chapter 5	Reform Opponents: Teachers, Unions, and the Implementation of Change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interviews with teacher union representatives at the state and district level, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. 2. Interviews with teachers in selected field sites in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. 3. Interviews with policymakers and implementers in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar.
Chapter 6	Reform Proponents: The Role of Educational Decentralisation and Community Participation in Overcoming the Constraints to Change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus group discussions with community members in selected field sites in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. 2. Policy documents of the Government of Andhra Pradesh and the Government of Bihar. 3. Interviews with policymakers and experts at the state level.
Chapter 7	Politics, Schools, and the Poor- A Local View	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. School and household surveys in selected field sites in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. 2. Discussions with teachers and community members in selected villages in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. 3. Interviews with block/<i>mandal</i> level education officers and non-government organisations (NGOs)

*Appendix 1(continued)***1 A. Note on Key Informant Interviews-Policy makers, reform implementers, teacher union leaders, political representatives**

By far the most important source of information was interviews with key informants, especially policymakers and stakeholders. Since the policy process in a federal context goes through various stages, from setting out or “diagnosing” the issues, debating ideas, formulating an agenda and authorising policy, to its implementation, and thereafter the consolidation of change, the number of actors are many, and they work at various levels. Table 2 lists the actors interviewed at various levels, and the themes on which information was obtained from each of these interviews.

Further, the names of national policymakers, state-level policymakers and implementers were available to me from my experience of work with the Government of India’s District Primary Education Programme during 1993–95, and from having served on various review missions of the Government of India to the states implementing the reform programme. Field officers of the UNICEF, the officers of the department of education in the Government of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, and the MV Foundation in Andhra Pradesh, also provided me with the names of relevant persons to be interviewed in the two states.

Table 2: Interviews at Various Levels

Level	Actors/Stakeholders	Theme
National	Policymakers and experts	Political-economy context of reform policy design and implementation
State	Policymakers and experts, including non-government organisations involved in educational reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political-economy context in the states. • Critical issues in school education policy in the states—policy making and implementation challenges. • Policies for teacher management and school decentralisation. • Attitude of political leaders to reforms. • Issues in implementation of reforms in the states.

	Teacher union representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History, internal structure of unions. • Teacher issues and grievances. • Attitude to education reforms. • Relationship with other unions. • Relationship with government. • Relationship with political parties and the political role of unions.
District	Reform implementation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of key issues in the implementation of reforms in the district.
	Teacher union representatives	(Same as teacher union representatives at the state level).
Block/Mandal	Educational administrators—Block Education Officers/Mandal Education Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role perception in terms of the needs of school teaching. • Academic support provided by them to teachers and schools. • The frequency/adequacy of their presence in schools.
	Office bearers of <i>Panchayati Raj</i> Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their understanding of the key challenges before school education in their area • Their role in the working of schools • Their attitude towards school committees (interface of political decentralisation with educational decentralisation).
	<i>Mandal</i> /block level representatives of teacher unions if present	A very thin presence of union representatives was found at this level.
	Political representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association with schools—how often they visit schools; what they actually do for the schools. • Knowledge of school reform programmes. • Attitude towards school reform programmes, and working of school or village education committees. • Relationship with <i>panchayats</i>.
Village	Focus group discussions with community members (including parents, non-parents,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory nature of the committees, including process of

	socially disadvantaged castes, and women) and members and office bearers of school/village education committees.	<p>elections and special representation for weaker social groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functioning of committees—regularity of meetings, issues taken up, decision-making process. • Effectiveness of the committees in taking up school related issues, including teacher supervision. • Relationship with the institutions of political decentralisation. • Political interference in the working of committees.
	Teachers in schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges faced by them in teaching in poor rural areas. • Academic support given to them by the educational administration team. • Their expectations on the nature of academic support required by them to improve teaching.

*Appendix I(continued)***1B: Note on Analysis of Data on Educational Finance Data (Chapter 3)**

The expenditure of the Centre and the states on education has been taken from the Government of India's *Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education* 1990–91 to 2006–07.

Budget Classification of Expenditure on Education: The budget classifies education expenditure under two heads—"General Education" and "Technical Education". I have used the expenditure classified under "General Education", and in the text, use of the term "education expenditure" of the Centre and the states refers to expenditure classified under "General Education", and incurred by the Department of Education alone. There are further sub-categories of this expenditure—namely expenditure on higher education, elementary education, adult education, language development, and others.

Revenue and Capital Expenditure: Budgetary expenditure for each sector is classified into two broad categories—expenditure incurred on the revenue account, and expenditure incurred on the capital account. "Revenue Account" disbursements show expenditure on salaries and allowances, contingencies, grants-in-aid, and maintenance outlays. "Capital Account" disbursements show incremental capital expenditure on construction and equipment. Bashir notes that almost 99 per cent of the expenditure of the Education Department is incurred on the "Revenue Account". But this does not mean that no investment expenditure is made in education. The capital investment in education mainly comes from other departments of the government such as the departments for rural development (undertakes school construction under poverty alleviation and employment generation programmes). Also, some of the "Revenue Account" expenditure such as grants-in-aid to local bodies allows investment expenditure to be incurred (Bashir 2000 p. 3). I have used only the expenditure incurred by Department of Education and not by other departments on education. I have, therefore, mainly analysed the revenue expenditure of the education department of the states and the Centre.

Plan and Non-Plan Expenditure: The Indian central and state budgets make a distinction between Plan and non-Plan expenditure. Mooij and Dev (2004 p. 99) estimate that nearly one quarter of the aggregate government expenditure is on Plan heads and is "officially intended for

new programmes and initiatives”. Further, they estimate that about three quarter of the aggregate expenditure is for non-Plan heads, and this includes the recurrent costs for all government departments (mainly salaries), interest repayments, and subsidies.

*Appendix 1(continued)***1C: Note on Analysis of Data on School Participation, National Sample Survey, 1993-94/2007-08 (Chapters 4 and 8).**

1. To explain the changes in school participation over time (1990s to present), by gender, social groups, and economic status, I have used NSSO data from four rounds, which include three “quinquennial” rounds on “Employment and Unemployment Situation of India” (50th, 55th, and 61st rounds) and the latest round on education (64th round).
2. While the formats for presentation and analysis of data were developed by me, the research organisation Indicus Analytics, and independent researcher Mridusmita Borodoloi provided assistance with extraction of unit level data using STATA software.
3. The year, sample size in terms of number of households and persons for each round of survey, are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Sample Size and Estimated Number of Persons for National Survey Rounds, 1993–94 to 2007–08

NSSO Round	Year*	Sample size in households	Sample size by number of persons	Estimated number of persons**
All India				
50	1993–94	115,354	564,740	778,297,682
55	1999–2000	120,514	596,281	916,607,400
61	2004–05	124,680	602,833	971,897,367
64	2007–08	100,581	445,960	1,011,228,200
Andhra Pradesh				
50	1993–94	8,552	37,332	62,143,594
55	1999–2000		53,380	73,139,000
61	2004–05	8,428	34,310	71,894,223
64	2007–08	6,971	26,313	73,884,700
Bihar				
50	1993–94	7,468	34,577	51,939,329
55	1999–2000		50,471	69,849,050
61	2004–05	5,754	30,844	71,069,853
64	2007–08	7,031	34,147	75,951,500

Note: *NSSO years are July-June. **Estimates generated by multiplying sample numbers with weights provided by NSSO.

4. **Weights:** The in-built weighting system, provided by the NSSO for every round has been used for generation of estimated numbers.
5. **Data for “New Bihar”:** The state of Bihar was bifurcated in 2000 into Bihar and a new state of Jharkhand. To ensure the comparability of NSS data for 50th and 55th rounds (when Bihar had not been bifurcated) with that of the 61st round, all the data for the state of Bihar refers to “New Bihar”, and includes NSS data for the region Jharkhand within the state of Bihar.
6. **Quintiles of Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE):** A household’s monthly expenditure per month is taken as a proxy of the living status of the household. Computed on a per person basis, the MPCE is the basis for official calculation of poverty in India. Quintiles based on MPCE for each round have been generated separately for each of the states, in this case separately for the states of Andhra and Bihar. Within each state, rural, urban, and overall (rural + urban) quintiles have been generated separately. Quintiles are generated separately for rural and urban areas for the following reason: the monthly per capita expenditure levels in rural areas are generally much lower than in the urban areas. If quintiles were generated based on overall population, then lower quintiles would be highly skewed towards rural areas and higher quintiles would be biased towards urban areas. Moreover living standards of rural and urban areas are also different.
7. **55th round of NSS consists of two rounds—“original” and “revisit”.** The revisit round consists of an additional sample size of 25 per cent of the original sample. Households covered in the original round of survey, were not covered in the revisit; the additional 25 per cent were therefore new households, covered only in the revisit schedule. Basic household information such as expenditure, caste, religion, and type (of household) was not covered in the revisit round. For the household characteristics that are not available for the revisit round, columns for such information show up as “non-reported”.
8. **For the 55th round, data analysed include original and revisit round, so we have a larger sample.**
9. **Lack of Sample and Missing Values:** In case of lack of sample in the raw data for a certain variable, the corresponding space in the table (reporting for that variable) has been kept blank. In case of missing values for certain indicators, those records with missing values in the raw data have not been excluded both in the numerator as well as denominator while calculating ratios/percentages. This methodology basically assumes that the missing values are equally distributed across all categories so as to avoid a bias in calculation. In most of the cases, missing values (if at all they are present) constitute less than 0.5 per cent of the total sample size for the particular state.

Definitions of key terms:

- a) **Enrolment**—Individuals reported by households as currently attending any educational institution and course of study are shown as “enrolled” by the NSSO data. Official figures on enrolment, published by the Government’s Department of Education, are collected on the basis of figures reported by the schools themselves. These figures are likely to have a possible bias in terms of reporting every name on the school register as “enrolled”. Very often therefore, the official gross enrolments exceed the child population for that age. Ghost reporting can be cross-checked by changing the source of information on enrolment from school to household reporting provided in the NSS. The exact question asked in the NSS survey is “current status in educational institution and course of study”. This question is asked for all persons below 30 years. Those who report “currently not attending” have been further classified as a) “never attended” and b) “ever attended but discontinued study” (in the 55th round) and “ever attended but currently not attending” (in the 61st round). These two classifications of not attending persons are not available for the 50th round.
- b) **Drop-out**—Individuals categorized as “ever attended but discontinued study” (in the 55th round) and “ever attended but currently not attending” (in the 61st round) have been considered as “drop-out” and the drop-out ratio has been calculated as the ratio of the number of children who have dropped-out to total number of children for the respective age groups being considered.
- c) **Never enrolled**—Individuals categorized as “never attended” have been considered as “never enrolled” and the never enrolled ratio has been calculated as the ratio of number of never enrolled children to total number of children in the respective age groups. Accordingly total out of school children constitutes all those currently not attending, that is—a) “never attended” and b) “ever attended but discontinued” taken together.

*Appendix 1(continued)***1D: Note on Selection of Field Sites for School and Household Survey, Interviews with Teachers and their Unions, and Focus Group Discussions on Educational Decentralisation**

Selection of Districts: A two-stage selection process was used in each state to identify the districts first, and within them the *mandals* or blocks, as the sub-district units in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar respectively are known as. The criterion for selecting the districts, followed by the sub-district units, was that of contrasting educational outcomes. In the first stage, all districts in each state were ranked on the basis of literacy rates of the 2001 Census (a robust indicator of educational outcomes), and three clusters made (clusters of districts with above, close to, and below state average literacy rates). Thereafter, one district was selected from the top cluster with higher than state average of literacy rate, and the second was selected from the bottom cluster with poor educational indicators.

Districts East Godavari in Andhra Pradesh and Gaya in Bihar were selected from districts with literacy rates above the state average, and Mahabubnagar in Andhra Pradesh and Purnia in Bihar were selected from the lowest cluster of districts with literacy rates below the state average.

Selection of Blocks or Mandals: Selection of sub-district units (2 in each of the selected districts) was the second stage of the selection process. In each district, two sub-district units were selected on the same principle of better and poor educational indicators. A total of 4 districts and 8 blocks were selected in this way. In AP, the selected *mandals* were Jadcherla and Dharur in Mahabubnagar and Prathipadu and Razule in East Godavari. In Bihar the selected blocks were Belaganj and Fatehpur in Gaya and Baysi and Kasba in Purnia.

Within each block or *mandal*, the following were undertaken:

- i. Interviews with teachers and their union representatives (this forms the data for Chapter 5).
- ii. A school and household survey to compare the condition and working of schools, nature of educational participation, and household involvement in schooling of children (this forms the data for Chapter 7).

- iii. Community responses on the nature of the local state and working of school decentralisation were elicited through focus group discussions (this forms the data for Chapter 6).

School and Household Survey

While data from the National Sample Surveys provided the research with robust indicators of household participation in schools, and of changes in educational participation over time, they were unable to shed light on the manner in which schools function in local settings. The sample survey for schools and households was undertaken by me with the objective of filling this gap.

For the survey, I had the assistance of a research team of five field researchers provided by the New Concept Information System, New Delhi and Hyderabad. Permission of the concerned officers in the Government of Andhra Pradesh and the Government of Bihar was obtained prior to visiting the field sites in September –October 2005 in Bihar and February March 2006 in Andhra Pradesh.

- a. *Selection of Schools:* The schools were randomly selected for each sub-district unit from school lists (for primary school or elementary schools with a primary section) provided by the District Primary Education Programme office. The total number of schools on the list was divided by the “quota” that is, 10 schools for every *mandal/* block. The quotient “n” was used for counting on the school list, and schools that fell on the “n” th number count were selected; 10 per cent oversampling was done in case schools were found to be closed at the time of visit. A survey questionnaire was administered for every school which was answered by the headmaster or in his absence, any other teacher. For every school, teachers were also interviewed separately on the challenges they faced with respect to teaching. A total number of 39 school were surveyed in AP and 40 schools were surveyed in Bihar.
- b. *Selection of Households:* The households were randomly selected from the school records for primary school grades I-V, 10 households for every school (making it a total of 100 households in each block/*mandal*, 200 households in every district, and 400 in each state). The random sample of households refers to those selected randomly from the school register. Since data on “out of school” children (drop-outs or never enrolled children) were not available in the school, such households were traced by asking at the village level. The purposively selected sample includes households additionally

identified in this manner. The total sample refers to both randomly selected and purposively included households. A total number of 399 households were surveyed in AP and 410 households were surveyed in Bihar.

- c. While randomness was compromised to the small extent of purposive inclusion of households with children out of school, this measure enhanced the stated objectives of the survey of inclusion of the community's voice on a range of issues of school participation and institutional functioning.

d. *Survey Questionnaire:*

The survey questionnaires were developed by me and discussed with research scholars at the Institute for Human Development, New Delhi. They were also pre-tested in June 2005, before I started the survey in September 2005.

School Record Schedule—This schedule records the quality of physical infrastructure in schools, teacher quality and adequacy, and student attendance. The respondents were head-teachers or in his/her absence, the officiating or senior-most teacher.

Household Schedule—This schedule records parent perceptions on the functioning of the school, their involvement in the schooling of their child, regularity of child's attending school, and their perception of the role of decentralisation (political in the form of *panchayats* and educational in the form of school committees) and political parties in improving schools. The respondents were heads of household, preferably female.

Teacher Interviews— This questionnaire was to be answered collectively (sitting together) by teachers in the school. This questionnaire mainly gathers teacher perceptions on the challenges of teaching, academic support received by them from the higher levels of the educational administration, grievances with respect to service conditions and administrative response to these. Sections of the questionnaire also elicit specific responses from para-teachers, and teacher opinion on the role of unions.

e. Data Analysis:

The primary data collected at the ground level was entered in Microsoft Access, and each page of the questionnaire was designed as a different table (file). After initial scrutiny and consistency check, files were imported in SPSS. Analysis of data and generation of analytical tables were done as SPSS output. The SPSS output tables were exported to Microsoft Excel. Tables were finally formatted in Microsoft Excel.

Field testing of primary survey questionnaires for schools and households was done in Ranga Reddy district in June 2005. During this visit, I also had discussions with *Panchayati Raj* Teachers' Union leaders in the district in order to formulate structured interview guides for teacher union leaders and gather the names and contact details of other primary school teacher unions. Since Bihar had very few unions, such a detailed exercise was not required; information provided by the state reform team—the Bihar Education Project office—was sufficient.

*Appendix 1(continued)***1 E: Note on Focus Group Discussions with Community Members and Members of School Education Committee in Andhra Pradesh and *Vidyalay Shiksha Samiti* in Bihar (Chapter 6)**

Method: The villages where focus group discussions were held, were selected randomly from amongst the villages where schools had been selected for the survey. The villages selected were “feeder” villages to the schools selected (that is each selected schools was earmarked for serving a particular village, and children from the particular village were expected to attend the earmarked school). I have detailed the procedure for selection of schools for the survey in *Appendix 1D*.

The names of SEC/VSS chairperson/*adhyaksha*, and other committee members were gathered from the school. Time and place of the FGD was publicised in advance. Women, members from marginalised castes and minority communities, and parents of non-school going children were specially mobilised to attend. The FGDs were held in both states after school hours, but before it was dark in Bihar (late afternoon) as there was no electricity. In Andhra Pradesh, the SEC members would often converge near the school even during school hours, while in Bihar, we had to persuade the members to come together and speak about issues related to their schools and children.

In Andhra Pradesh, resource persons from the New Concept Information Service, Hyderabad, led by Sudha, facilitated the mobilisation of villagers to attend the meeting and helped with the local Telugu language. I had learnt some key *telugu* words and was able to understand most of the conversation. The discussions were recorded by me in English, and one team member in *Telugu*. In Bihar, the New Concept Information Service, New Delhi team led by Shafique Ahmed and Pravin Ramteke facilitated mobilisation of VSS members, especially encouraging the purposive inclusion of members from the weaker castes and communities and women. I was conversant with the local dialects in both Gaya and Purnia, therefore no language assistance was required.

The discussion were structured around the following issues:

1. The process of elections and nature of membership—whether the elections were free, fair and regular, whether women and weaker sections were adequately represented.
2. Regularity of meetings and the participatory process.
3. Issues or grievances raised in the meetings.
4. Whether the schools function regularly and have adequate resources.
5. Teacher punctuality and regularity, teacher’s interaction with community members.
6. Working of incentive scheme mid-day meal—quality, regularity.
7. Schools committees and politics, especially the role of *panchayats* and teacher unions.
8. Other issues and voices of the community.

The discussions were recorded in writing and later cross-tabulated around these themes for analytical purposes. On this basis, a final report was generated for discussions with each community.

Table 3: Total Number of FGDs conducted and of Persons who Attended the FGDs					
District/Block/Mandal	No. of FGDs	No. of Persons	District/Block/Mandal	No. of FGDs	No. of Persons
East Godavari	7	74	Gaya	7	141
Razule	4	37	Belaganj	4	70
Prathipadu	3	37	Fatehpur	3	71
Mahabubnagar	6	36	Purnia	6	216
Jadcherla	3	20	Baysi	3	142
Dharur	3	16	Kasba	3	74
Andhra Pradesh	13	110	Bihar	13	357

*Appendix 2***Key Informant Interviews 1: Policymakers and Experts, National and State Level.**

Name	Location	Position	Organisation	Date
Amita Sharma	Office of the Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi	Joint Secretary (Former State Project Director of the Madhya Pradesh Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission)	Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.	11 May 2009.
Anjani Kumar	BEP office, Patna, Bihar.	State Project Director, Bihar Shiksha Pariyojana Parishad.	Department of Education, Government of Bihar.	1 October 2005.
Anjani Kumar Singh	New Secretariat, Patna, Bihar	Principal Secretary, Education Government of Bihar	Department of Education, Government of Bihar.	12 January 2011.
Aruneesh Chawla	Old Secretariat, Patna, Bihar	Special Secretary – cum-Additional Finance Commissioner.	Government of Bihar.	4 June 2007.
B.K. Sinha	Office of the Ministry of <i>Panchayati Raj</i> , New Delhi	Additional Secretary	Department of <i>Panchayati Raj</i> , Government of India.	13 February 2008.
Chandramouli	Office of the District Primary Education Programme, Hyderabad.	State Project Director, Andhra Pradesh District Primary Education Programme	Government of Andhra Pradesh.	6 February 2006.
D.Sambasiva Rao	By telephone and email	Principal secretary, School Education	Government of Andhra Pradesh.	21 December 2011.
Deepak Kumar	New Secretariat,	Principal Secretary, Department of	Department of <i>Panchayati Raj</i> ,	12 January 2011.

	Patna, Bihar	Panchayati Raj	Government of Bihar.	
Dr.I.V.Subba Rao	Government of Andhra Pradesh Secretariat, Hyderabad.	Former Secretary, Department of Education, Government of Andhra Pradesh Hyderabad.	Government of Andhra Pradesh.	6 February 2006.
Prof. Krishna Kumar	National Council for Educational Research and Training, New Delhi.	Director	National Council for Educational research and Training (NCERT).	11 February 2008.
H.S. Negi	BEP office, Patna, Bihar	State Project Director, Bihar Shiksha Pariyojana Parishad	Department of Education, Government of Bihar.	2 March 2005
Job Zachariah	UNICEF Office, Patna, Bihar.	Programme Officer for Education	UNICEF Office for Bihar and Jharkhand.	6 October 2005.
Latha Menon	UNICEF state office, Hyderabad.	Education Officer	UNICEF	24 January 2006.
Dr. M.M. Jha	Department of Education, New Secretariat, Patna, Bihar	Principal Secretary Education	Department of Education, Government of Bihar.	5 June 2007.
MikiTanae	UNICEF Office, Patna, Bihar.	Assistant Project Officer, Education and research student at the Graduate School of Education, Harvard.	UNICEF Office for Bihar and Jharkhand.	-1 October 2005. -6 October 2005.
Rajesh Bhusan	Soochana Bhavan, Patna, Bihar	State Project Director, Bihar Shiksha Pariyojana Parishad	Department of Education, Government of Bihar.	12 January 2011.
Dr.R.V.V.Ayyar	National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi	Professor, Public Policy and former Additional Secretary Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource	Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore.	27 December 2008.

		Development, Government of India.		
Reddy Prakash	Directorate of Education, Government of, Andhra Pradesh	Project officer DPEP and Janshala (UNICEF assisted)	Department of Education, Government of Andhra Pradesh	- 20 June 2005. - 23 January 2006.
Sanjay	Pataliputra Colony, Patna	Bihar State co- ordinator	PRATHAM, and NGO working in education	12 January 2011
Prof. Shanta Sinha			National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights	-22 and 23 June 2005. -2 May 2010.
Vijay Raghavan	Office of the Industrial Development and .., New Secretariat, Patna, Bihar.	Principal Secretary, Industries, Government of Bihar	Government of Bihar	5 June 2007.
Venkat Reddy	MV Foundation Office, Hyderabad	Secretary and founder member, MV Foundation, NGO working for child rights and education	M V Foundation	22 June 2005.
Vinoba Gautam	UNICEF Office, Patna, Bihar.	Programme Officer for Education(formerly with Bihar education Project, Ranchi, Bihar)	UNICEF Office for Bihar and Jharkhand.	6 October 2005.
Yagati Chinna Rao	School of Social Sciences, JawaharLal Nehru University.	Expert on Andhra Dalit politics.	Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi	25 October 2011.

Note: Includes a list of policymakers and experts at the national level, interviewed in New Delhi, and at the state level interviewed in Hyderabad and Patna respectively (unless other-wise mentioned).

*Appendix 3***Key Informant Interviews 2: Teacher Union Representatives****I. Andhra- Pradesh**

	Name	Location	Position	Organisation	Date
Hyderabad					
1.	P. Sudhakar Reddy	Hyderabad	President/General Secretary	<i>Panchayati</i> Raj Teachers Union (PRTU)	-13 July 2005. - 23 August 2005
2.	K. Venugopal	Chennupati Bhavan, Hyderabad	President	Andhra Pradesh Teacher's Federation (APTF)-257	16 August 2005.
3.	Y. Satyam	C/o M. Balakrishnamma, Chikadpally, Hyderabad	President	Andhra Pradesh Teacher's Federation (APTF)-1938	8 August 2005.
4.	S. Ramchander Rao, President	206 Kesav Nilayam, Barkatpura Hyderabad	President	Andhra Pradesh Upadhyay Sangh (APUS)	29 August 2005.
5.	N.S.S.Sarma	Anuradaha Apartments, Barkatpura Hyderabad	President	Democratic Teacher's Federation (DTF)	18 August 2005.
6.	Dr.M. Gangadhar	-do-	General Secretary	-do-	-do-
7.	K. Venkateshwara Reddy	Government High School Rajendra Nagar, Ranga Reddy District.	General Secretary	Government Teacher's Association (GTA)	
8.	P. Subba Reddy	STU Bhavan, Kachiguda, Hyderabad	President	State Teacher's Union (STU).	2 August 2005.
9.	M. Sathi Reddy		Vice President	Telengana Regional Teacher's Union.	28 July 2005.

				
Continued.	Name	Location	Position	Organisation	Date
10.	M.A.K.Dutt	Chenupatti Bhavan, Hyderabad.	Central Secretary (Office)	United Teacher's Federation (UTF)	25 August 2005.
11.	N. Narayan	-do-	General Secretary	United Teacher's Federation (UTF)	3 August 2005.
<i>District East Godavari</i>					
12.	Y. Venkat Raju	SSA office, Library Road, Kakinada	General Secretary, East Godavari District	APTF-257	2 March 2006.
13.	K. Apparao	SSA office, Library Road, Kakinada	Vice President, East Godavari District	APTF-257	2 March 2006.
14.	T. Venkat Rao	SSA office, Library Road, Kakinada	District Vice President, Hyderabad District.	APTF-257	2 March 2006.
15.	K. Sathiraju	SSA office, Library Road, Kakinada	General Secretary, East Godavari	APUTF	28 February 2006.
16.	K.S.S. Prasad	SSA office, Library Road, Kakinada	District Secretary, East Godavari	APUTF	28 February 2006.
17.	I. Prasad Rao	Prathipadu Mandal Head quarter office.	District Counsellor and Secretary of Joint Action Committee of Non- Government Employees	APUTF	1 March 2006.
18.	Subbaraju	SSA office, Library Road, Kakinada	Conveynor, Academic Wing	State Teachers Union (STU)	27 February 2006.
19.	Jeyaraju K.	SSA office, Library Road, Kakinada	State Associate President	State Teachers Union (STU)	27 February 2006.
20.	D. Venkat Rao	SSA office, Library Road, Kakinada	District President	State Teachers Union (STU)	27 February 2006.

21.	V. Makhiraju	SSA office, Library Road, Kakinada	District President	Panchayati Raj Teachers Union	28 February 2006.
22.	N. Venkateshwara Rao+	SSA office, Library Road, Kakinada	District General Secretary	Panchayati Raj Teachers Union	28 February 2006.
23.	PVSR Murthy	SSA office, Library Road, Kakinada	State Organising Secretary	Panchayati Raj Teachers Union	28 February 2006.
25.	C.H. Nageswara Rao		Former District President	Panchayati Raj Teachers Union	28 February 2006
<i>District Mahabubnagar</i>					
26.	B. Satya Narayan	SSA Office, Mahabubnagar	District President	State Teachers Union	14 February 2006.
27.	Kishtaiah	Office of UTF, Near Bus Stand, Mahabubnagar	Secretary	United Teacher's Federation (UTF)	13 February 2006.
28.	Ramakanth Rao	JadcharlaMandal Education office.	President, Jadcherla Mandal	Panchayati Raj Teachers Union	10 February 2006.

I. Bihar

	Name	Location	Position	Organisation	Date
1.	Brij Nandan Sharma	Prathmik Shikshak Sangh office, Near Gandhi Maidan, Patna	State <i>Adyaksha</i> (Chairman) for the teachers union for primary school teachers- <i>Prathmik Shikshak Sangh</i>	<i>Prathmik Shikshak Sangh</i> .	4 June 2007.
2.	Devendra Prasad Sinha	<i>Silonjha</i> Middle School, Belaganj, Gaya.	Block-level Secretary <i>Prathmik Shikshak Sangh</i> , Block Belaganj, Gaya.	<i>Prathmik Shikshak Sangh</i> .	29 September 2005.
3.	Mundrika Prasad Yadav	Outside the District Education office, Gaya.	Pradhan Sachiv	Non-Gazetted Primary Teacher's Union, Gaya	28 September 2005.
4.	Ravi Nandan Sharma		Gaya District Secretary	<i>Prathmik Shikshak Sangh</i>	28 September 2005.
5.	Krishna Nand Singh	Bhatta Market, Kasba	Pradhan Sachiv, Kasba Block, Purnia.	<i>Prathmik Shikshak Sangh</i>	18 September 2005.
6.	Mahendra Prasad Singh*	Tea-stall opposite Office of the District Superintendent of Education, Gaya.	Leader and Spokesperson for Gaya District	<i>Arajpatrit Prathmik</i> (Non-Gazetted) <i>Prarambhik Shikshak Sangh</i> .	3 October 2005.
7.	Chandradeo Prasad Singh*	Tea-stall opposite Office of the District Superintendent of Education, Gaya.	Bihar State President	<i>Arajpatrit Prathmik</i> (Non-Gazetted) <i>Prarambhik Shikshak Sangh</i> .	3 October 2005.
8.	Mohammed Mansur Ansari*	Tea-stall opposite Office of the District Superintendent of Education, Gaya.	Gaya Mahanagar President	<i>Arajpatrit Prathmik</i> (Non-Gazetted) <i>Prarambhik Shikshak Sangh</i> .	3 October 2005.
9.	Dhananjay Singh*	Tea-stall opposite Office of the District Superintendent of Education, Gaya.	Representative	<i>Pragatisheel Shikshak Sangh</i> , a union of untrained teachers.	3 October 2005.

Notes: Structured Interview schedules were used for conducting these interviews (by me). Mr.Vidyasagar Kolan Reddy,Centre for Economic and Social Studies Hyderabad, assisted in conducting the state-level interviews in Hyderabad. *Persons did not respond to the structured interview schedule; discussions were held with them and I requested them to comment on issues i-v above (and covered in greater detail in the questionnaire). So, their responses, recorded by me in my field notes, were comparable to those in the questionnaire.

Appendix 4

**Key Informant Interviews 3: District and *Mandal*/Block-Level: Officers of the
Department of Education, Reform Implementation team, and Political
Representatives**

Name	Location	Position	Organisation	Date
<i>I. ANDHRA PRADESH</i>				
Mr. D.N. Murthy	SSA Office, Kakinada	District Programme Co- ordinator (DPC)	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan/District Primary Education Programme, East Godavari, AP.	28 February, 2006
Mr. Rajeshwar	SSA Office, Mahabubnagar	Assistant Programme Co- ordinator (APC)	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan/District Primary Education Programme, Mahabubnagar, AP.	9 February 2006
Mr. B.Yadagiri	MEO Office, Jadcherla, Mahabubnagar	Mandal Education Officer, Jadcherla	Education Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh	11 February 2006
Mr. Swaraj	MEO Office, Dharur, Mahabubnagar	Mandal Education Officer, Dharur	Education Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh	15 February 2006
<i>II. BIHAR</i>				
Mr. Rambhagat Yadav	BEO Office, Baysi, Purnia	Block Education Officer, Baysi	Education Department, Government of Bihar	September, 12, 2005
Mr. Rajak	BEO Office, Kasba, Purnia	Block Education Officer, Kasba	Education Department, Government of Bihar	September 20, 2005.
Mr. Ishwar Singh	BEO Office, Fatehpur, Gaya	Block Education Officer, Kasba	Education Department, Government of Bihar	October 1, 2005
Mr. Rampravesh Singh, Gaya,	BEO Office (outside), Belaganj, Gaya	Block Education Officer, Belaganj	Education Department, Govt. of Bihar	October 2, 2005.

Mr. Haji Abussubhan	Baysi, Purnia	Member Legislative Assembly, Baysi	Associated with the Rashtriya Janta Dal (Political Party)	September 19, 2005
Mr. Afaque Aalam	Kasba, Purnia	Member Legislative Assembly, Kasba		September 19, 2005
Mr. Syed Ruknuddin	Baysi, Purnia	Political Leader, Former Member Legislative Assembly, Baysi	Associated with the Congress (Political Party)	September 21, 2005
Notes: Structured Interview schedules were used for conducting these interviews (by me). Mr. Shafique Ahmed, New Concept Information Service, assisted while conducting the interviews in Bihar.				

Appendix 5

List of Villages where FGDs were held.

I. Andhra Pradesh

Village	Mandal	District	Date
District 1			
Gandipuram	Razule	East Godavari	1 March 2006
ThatipakaMatham	Razule	East Godavari	3 March 2006
SC Colony Vegivaripalem	Razule	East Godavari	5 March 2006
Co-operative School	Razule	East Godavari	5 March 2006
Gajjanpudi	Prathipadu	East Godavari	8 March 2006
Peedipalem	Prathipadu	East Godavari	13 March 2006
Kittamooripeta	Prathipadu	East Godavari	15 March 2006
District 2			
Guvvaladine	Dharur	Mahabubnagar	14 February 2006
TurupaTanda	Dharur	Mahabubnagar	16 February 2006
Kothulagidda	Dharur	Mahabubnagar	15 February 2006
Chinnapally	Jadcherla	Mahabubnagar	10 February 2006
Pedda Adirala	Jadcherla	Mahabubnagar	13 February 2006
Kodgal	Jadcherla	Mahabubnagar	11 February 2006

II. Bihar

Village	Block	District	Date
District 1			
Mayapur	Fatehpur	Gaya	22 September 2005
Dhanchu	Fatehpur	Gaya	21 September 2005
Aamin P.S.	Fatehpur	Gaya	26 September 2005
SaraiyaHarijanTola	Belaganj	Gaya	24 September 2005
HemantBigha	Belaganj	Gaya	25 September 2005
Majlispur	Belaganj	Gaya	28 September 2005
Akhtu	Belaganj	Gaya	29 September 2005
District 2			
Bajardih	Baysi	Purnia	14 September 2005
Puranaganj	Baysi	Purnia	12 September 2005
Sonapur	Baysi	Purnia	13 September 2005
Neematol	Kasba	Purnia	16 September 2005
Bareta	Kasba	Purnia	15 September 2005
Tinpania	Kasba	Purnia	17 September 2005