CHAPTER 4: EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN INDIA

While we have briefly considered the manner in which international educational concerns and policy has been framed in the previous chapter, in this one we shall briefly take a look at the manner in which Indian educational policy has been framed over the past couple of decades. The chapter will not directly delve into a critique of contemporary educational praxis in India but serves just to indicate the uncritical manner in which the dominant international educational ‘world view’ has been adopted. Attention needs to be paid especially to the manner in which policy seems unreflective or rhetorical especially from the perspective of duration and the subjective rendering of temporality. The attempt is to reveal the manner in which contemporary education as a prerogative inherited by the modern nation state seems to sacrifice the qualitative, subjective and individual aspects of education for the quantitative, objective and social goals that seem to characterise the developmental agenda of the nation.

4.1 Universal education as a law in contemporary India

Any relevant discussion on Education must begin by taking into consideration its contemporary state of affairs vis a vis policy and governance in the location at which it takes place. In this regard, The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 is a landmark achievement in the history of education in India. This piece of legislation makes provision for the free and compulsory education of all children between the ages of six to fourteen. The 'compulsory' in the policy obligates the government of the nation to not only administer but also monitor the admission as well as completion of elementary education for all children, keeping in mind qualitative factors such as a nationally standardized curriculum and learning materials, infrastructure and a sufficient number of qualified teachers.

Such an initiative can be said to be extensive for a number of reasons. To begin with, the policy brings focus on the need to establish schools in all regions of the country especially targeting children from marginalized and underprivileged backgrounds who in the past seem to have evaded the radar of the educational apparatus. Special mention of the children of migrants, attention to details pertaining to disabled children, late joiners and drop-outs enabling them to finish elementary education even if they have crossed the stipulated age of fourteen along with the
provision for free pre-school education for those without the necessary resources are suggestive of its reach.

The framers of the policy seem to have paid close attention to the politics within the educational apparatus. For we find in the first chapter of the policy itself an interesting definition of the school that distinguishes between fully aided, partially aided, specified category schools as well as wholly unaided private schools. This definition accumulates mileage in the manner in which free and compulsory education for children manifests itself across this spectrum. Such a scheme of things in ordering the free and compulsory education of children between the two ends of the spectrum as represented by public and private schools indicate some of the socio-economic tensions inherent in the field of education.

We also notice some of the finer nuances of the social and cultural implications of such segregating practices among schools reflected in the strict punitive measures laid out to curb practices such as background screening and the charging of capitation fees. These measures seem to come into play under the requirement that private schools allot at least twenty-five per cent of their admissions to children from underprivileged backgrounds. The bureaucratic processes within educational institutions are also taken into consideration in an effort to keep the necessary documents for enrolment into school rather simple. The policy not to hold back or expel any child until the completion of elementary education along with the discretion of the government to withdraw the certificate of recognition to schools in breach of any of the above policies indicate the manner in which educational reform has evolved in the past decade or so. The question of an even representation in education is evident in the case of the School Management Committees that private schools have to set up where half of the members of this body necessarily need to be women. Seventy-five per cent of such bodies need to be composed of by the parents or guardians of children with a proportionate representation of marginalized groups and weaker sections of the society. These committees are entrusted with the task of developing development plans in accordance with the provisions of the Right to Education Act.

The focus in the latter sections of the policy shifts away from the government and schools towards another important component namely the teachers. Once again we see a reflection of the practical realities of elementary education in India as the framers acknowledge that there might be teachers in backward states that are not qualified as per its stipulations. While retaining the
discretion to award a five year extension to achieve the required qualifications in such regions, they nevertheless retain a firm stance on what can be conceived as lax attitudes on the part of teachers.

Thus regularity and punctuality in attendance, competence in completing the curriculum in time and the need to regularly appraise the abilities of children and keep their parents or guardians informed are seen as crucial tasks. The failure to adhere to these requirements is seen as grounds for initiation of disciplinary action against teachers. In addition to such strictures this policy is also sensitive to the challenges faced by teachers. Thus we find bureaucratic cognizance of the requirement to maintain an adequate student teacher ratio as well as keep the teachers away from administrative tasks. Yet despite this awareness, practical solutions to such problems still seem distant especially in the praxis of the public schools.

Brief mention is also made of the curriculum of elementary education which is prescribed to be in the interest of the values enshrined in the constitution of the nation. The emphasis in this section is on a child-centred and child friendly manner in which the all-round mental and physical abilities of the child are to be fostered. Such a prerogative parallels to the contemporaneous The Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005. An independent commission set up in the face of critical issues such as child labour and abuse to deal exclusively with administering to the just and fair treatment of all children in the nation in a just and fair manner. Thus the fears, trauma and anxiety of being a child are allayed alongside the continuous and comprehensive development of the talent, potential and knowledge of the child in a democratic fashion.1

4.2 Historical precedents to the Right to Education

Much before compulsory primary education became a law in India the ideal existed in various policy documents drawing upon principles enshrined in the constitution of the nation. What is interesting is that many of the topics in current discussion such as democratic values, equality in access, quality and rural equity repeatedly find mention in the reports of successive committees such as the Education Commission (1964-1966) and the National Policy on Education (1968) to name a few. For the reason of historical proximity we begin here with a review a version of the National Policy on Education (1986), which was modified in 1992.

1(For more on this see RTE (2005)).
The National Policy on Education (1986), in its introduction announces that the time has arrived for change, a change that is envisioned to reach all sections of society through education, thus prompting new directions in educational policy. Reviewing progress since the National Policy on Education (1968), the report asserts that great progress has been made. Progress that measures in terms of new post graduate and research centres, acceptance across states of the 10+2+3 system, as well as provision in ninety per cent of the rural areas with schools within a one kilometre radius. Despite such improvements it is acknowledged that there has been a gap between policy and implementation that has affected quality, quantity, utility and access.

The need of the hour thus appears in the document as a meticulous and sensitive planning and execution of educational policy in a time when social and democratic values are undergoing increasing strain. Rural-urban disparities, population control and the new tensions that progress brings requires that new generations are creative in the reception of new ideas while being committed to social justice and humane values. Education thus emerges as a unique investment in the present and future, the field of material and spiritual development where a scientific temper and independent spirit can be forged in tune with the values of secularism.

The description of the national system of education in the report is characterized by a common school system that provides equality to all, not only in access but also in conditions of success through an education of comparable quality. The curriculum of such an education is based on our national identity and cultural heritage and upholds the protection of the environment, gender equality and the values and obligations of our constitution. Thus the curriculum serves to address the prejudices and complexes inherent in the social environment by promoting a world view of peace and understanding among nations based on the inherent equality of all. Such a curriculum would additionally promote a rediscovery of the diverse socio-cultural realities of India and promote bilingualism by means of translating literature across the different languages of India.

4.3 Different forms and goals of education
Institutions of elementary education, higher education, technical education, adult literacy as well as research institutes in science and technology, in their reliance on the entire nation to provide resource support are imagined as a part of a vast network of universal character that supports a great deal of inter mobility on the basis of their open character thus promoting the virtues of lifelong learning amongst the populace. A wide range of national committees steered by the Union
government are envisioned as working in an integrated manner across different states to achieve this goal.

Under the auspices of education for equality, we find emphasis on the need to remove disparity by equalizing educational opportunities for the handicapped, minorities, women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Educational reform in the context of the disadvantaged is conceived as ‘an act of faith and social engineering’ that seeks to remedy through positive interventions the status of the disadvantaged by fostering new values and attitudes towards them. Appropriate changes in curriculum content and the adequate training of policy makers, administrators and teachers are proposed as the means by which such reform can be achieved. Additionally various forms of incentives along with specialized support services and effective monitoring are proposed as effective ways of increasing the enrolment and retention of members from disadvantaged groups.

Besides providing infrastructure the training and recruitment of teachers from such groups also serve as affirmative measures of significance. While elementary education represents only one level of education, similar provision needs to be made at the levels of pre-school, adult education and informal education. Given that India is a diverse country with many languages; their development is a crucial aspect especially in the educational needs of disadvantaged groups and communities. Provision has been made for a fair treatment of the handicapped as well. If feasible, education shall be provided under normal provision with the goal of inclusion to boost courage and confidence, additionally teachers may be provided with special training to meet the special needs of such individuals.

The description of adult education places the basic literacy skills of reading and writing as means of escaping ignorance and oppression. Targeting the age group of fifteen to thirty-five, the document urges the whole nation including state and central governments, educational institutions, youth, teachers, social activists, and students to participate in adult literacy programs and campaigns. Such programs while bringing about literacy are expected to create the same values mentioned to be at the core of the curriculum of the national educational system. Proposed post literacy programs include the establishment of a wide range of institutions such as good quality libraries, reading rooms, learner's groups and centres for continued education. While employers
too have been held responsible for promoting adult education, there also is a mention of provision for training in functional and vocational skills that provide employment possibilities.

What is interesting in the description of the proposed reorganization of education at different levels is that its goals and directives bear a close correspondence to those espoused by policy documents of the UNESCO Education for All initiative that gains momentum since the universal declaration of the Conventions on the Right of the Child (1989). As we shall see later both policies are similar in description of provisions as well as the division of education into pre-school, elementary, secondary, higher, vocational, adult and non-formal education.

Acknowledging the reality of a large number of first generation learners from marginalized backgrounds entering the education system for the first time, provision for care in terms of health, nutrition and adequate stimulation through play based activities are stressed. Such early childhood care and education activities are deem crucial for a preparation for primary education. The directives with regard to elementary education focus on the access, enrolment and retention in school, of all children unto the age of fourteen. Quality in a child friendly education is based on the adequate provision of learning materials, spacious environments and sufficient number of teaching staff with a special focus on having more female teachers. On this note the educational environment needs to be warm and friendly, supportive of activity based learning allowing the child to set his or her own pace while avoiding detention and capital punishment. While complexity in content needs to be introduced gradually and skills fostered through practice.

Secondary education is identified as the level at which mathematics, science, social science and the humanities are introduced along with historical and constitutional materials that foster the spirit of democracy, socialism and secularism promoting national integration with due respect to its vast diversity. An interesting feature of at this level is the provision for promotion of special talent through NavodayaVidyalayas that provide a common environment favouring innovation and experimentation for children from all backgrounds.

New approaches to training in mathematics and sciences are proposed. In the case of the former, its treatment as a separate subject needs to be replaced by considering it as a part of any analysis or reasoning that enables children to think or articulate logically. Technological inventions such as the computer which introduces children to the interplay of variables, computing and cause-effect relations provide more relevant and grounded methods in teaching and learning practices.
Innovations in the teaching and learning of science by encouraging inquiry into aspects of everyday life, health, agriculture and industry by promoting problem solving, objectivity, creativity and decision-making mark new approaches to education in these subjects.

Educational policy at this level rightly identifies the crucial status of secondary education among all the levels of education as the stage that links childhood to adulthood, general education to specialization as well as education to work. This is also the educational level at which greater levels of inequity exists as disadvantaged groups for a number of reasons don't enter or never complete this stage thus calling for better planning and improved strategies for tackling educational equality. The provision of meaningful manual work experience that produces value for the community in terms of goods and services is proposed an important process of learning that might at a later stage help entry into a vocation or just help in identifying the abilities, interests and needs of students.

Non-formal education thus finds its significance in the educational apparatus in relation to secondary education. Catering to working children, those who have never been to school and dropouts, efforts in this area are to parallel the quality and content of formal education but with a qualified teaching force that is sensitive to the local context of such children. Basic vocation training that is flexible, need based and non-formal and can support a variety of vocational fields as well as specialized ones also emerge at this educational crossroad. Health management is one such specialized sector, training for which beginning early as a part of the formal educational curriculum; other such sectors include agriculture, marketing and social services.

The role of vocational training thus involves increasing employability, developing healthy attitudes, knowledge and skills towards work and life in relation to self-employment as well as labour market demands. Though primarily for those who have completed secondary education, vocation training can also begin earlier and are to be provided by public and private sectors as well as the government. Such training also needs to make provision for the professional growth of its trainees by providing lateral entry into streams of formal education and vice-versa. Job provision of such graduates need to be monitored to supplement its diversification upon market trends.

Higher education is deemed necessary for national development contextualized by the expanding basis of knowledge across the world and the need for quality teachers to translate such knowledge back into education. Affiliation processes are to promote more autonomous
universities, while the existing hundred and fifty university and five thousand colleges are to be expanded and consolidated. Accountability of the increased freedom and autonomy of colleges are to be supervised by state councils in partnership with the University Grants Commission (UGC). As a specialist enterprise higher education is to foster reflective and creative practices in scientific, socio-cultural moral spheres. In order to promote a robust higher education system both specializations as well flexibility will be supported.

Admission into higher education will be regulated by capacity. Teachers, teaching materials and method especially for science and technology will receive continued attention. Humanities and the social sciences using interdisciplinary methods will be promoted in an effort to project the rich knowledge traditions of ancient India upon current reality. Sanskrit and other classical languages will be promoted autonomously to this end. Research interests will be promoted by creating suitable environments and networks to facilitate better co-ordination, supervision of these processes by governing bodies are to promote high standards of quality in research. Embodying notions of balance at the level of the diversities in learning, an impetus is present for the idea of Rural University, to promote education along a Gandhian perspective which focuses on grassroots and rural transformation.

The assessment of contemporary Indian society suggests a gap between cultural traditions and the system of formal education, with cynicism creeping and values fading. The obsession of modern technologies which we have in the previous sections been identified as a medium of national development also seems to carry the seed of severance from our diverse and rich past. Thus this policy document asserts the need in education to tread a fine line between technology and culture to keep this severance from culture at bay. Education therefore must function as a forceful tool to uphold universal and timeless values of oneness, beauty, harmony and refinement through curricular reform and the provision of suitable resource persons. Art, archaeology and folklore thus are in the need of renewed attention from all quarters.

Emphasis on an environmental consciousness to inform teaching and learning across all levels as well as the promotion of yoga in schools beginning with its introduction in teacher training are suggestive of some of the proposed measures to address the issues of values and culture. The proposed provision of public policy to assign open urban spaces for play and plans to develop sports infrastructure complete with equipment and staff as a part of school improvement
along with specific attention on traditional sports and games all seem to support this vision. The schemes for the youth to be a part of services that promotes national and social development to fit the bill of activities that sensitises and provides values in a more practical way.

4.4 Educational futures
Showing great foresight into the economic changes of the future the report also suggests the need for management and technical education to function in mutual relationship to each other. The need to keep track of human resources, especially technical and managerial manpower as well as introduce new technologies into the infrastructure, services and the unorganized rural sector find themselves within the educational horizon. In this context of keeping abreast with technology, a widespread implementation of computer education across all levels is deemed important.

Additionally open universities and distance learning that embrace notions of lifelong learning are identified as viable options to democratize access to higher, technical and management education. Such programs based on flexible modules and systems of credit are to make innovative use of mass media that reduces the constraints of distance and time in enabling the transmission of educational programs of relevance, thus providing multiple entry points across levels in education.

Education in the management of currently under-managed sectors especially those characteristic of the Indian experience are envisioned as providing the basis for new forms of management education. Training for entrepreneurship by means of self-employment can be a formidable example of the former. Such requirements place a huge demand for a radically new kind of teacher, curriculum as well as technology. Training on this platform needs to begin in order to replace older forms of vocational education and management that may no longer be relevant. Thus the technological reinvention of educational processes need to be pursued by technical institutes by means of rigorous research and development with the goal of producing a workforce which in turn is capable of research and development in their concerned fields. Increased connectivity and collaboration between current institutes across sectors is thus deemed vital to improve existing technologies and pave the way for innovative new technologies.

Given the high costs involved with both technical and management education, effectiveness and efficiency are identified as the need of the hour and educational modernization
is proposed only on the basis of these goals. The goals of such a modernization are therefore not ornamental but a means to improve functional efficiency. The recruitment of staff will maintain these standards and opportunities and conditions of the staff will be improved accordingly. The staffs are entrusted with great responsibility as they will have to occupy various roles from curriculum development, institution management to teaching and research. Initial and in-house training is mandatory and will be integrated at regional and national levels.

While up to date learning facilities and resources will be provided along with adequate infrastructure for sports and cultural activities, the institutions are also required to generate funds for themselves by servicing the industry and community. This interface with the industry and community is also seen as a source of creative collaboration and exchange of physical and intellectual resources. Thus keeping up with current as well as projected needs and trends of the industry is deemed crucial to the development of technical and management education. The pursuit for excellence and innovation will be recognized and rewarded with academic, administrative and financial autonomy within the reasonable grounds of accountability which shall be maintained by the government instituted council.

4.5 The management of education

A crucial element in the management of any institution is its assessment of performance for the purposes of improving quality. In the realm of education which involves teaching and learning, examinations serve as this measure. Since education is a continuous process it follows that examinations too need to be continuous and involve both formal as well as informal aspects. Reducing the emphasis on memorization, the replacement of marks with grades along with measure to keep in check elements of chance and subjectivity are some of the proposed reforms in the process. Additionally changes in content are to be mirrored in methodology to maintain consistency while examination as a process itself is in the need of improvement. Supplementing these changes is the necessity that teachers, parents and students use such forms of evaluation effectively.

 Teachers play an important role not only in shaping educational outcomes but in shaping society as well; the status awarded to teachers is therefore a reflection of society itself. A constructive and creative approach need to be taken up by the government and community in creating an inspirational environment and ensuring adequate participation of teachers in the design
and implementation of educational programs. Only given this freedom can teachers serve societies by framing innovative interactions and activities in education. Associations of teachers also play an important role in fostering professionalism and upholding best practices.

Given that teachers most often function under a national framework, steps need to be taken to ensure that there is some form of transparency and uniformity in matters of pay, working conditions, vocational deployment and addressing grievances. On the other hand fair forms of assessment, accountability and providing incentives are necessary to maintain high teaching quality. Matters of recruitment need to be carried out objectively and on the basis of merit and in relation to the necessary demographic and functional requirements.

Progress and change are inevitable factors that every institution has to deal with. As flag bearers of the educational institutions, teachers too need to adapt to such changes and keep abreast with the transformations in their field. Thus proposed changes in teacher training reflect this need for continued education as well has approaching the unity of pre-service and in-service teacher training as a continuous process. Such forms of training which will target teachers engaged in elementary schools as well as non-formal adult education will be carried out by regional teacher training institutes under the supervision of state level councils. All such activities will come under the purview of the National Council of Teacher Education which will provide resources and guidance on curricula and methods, accredit subsidiary institutes of teacher training and chart networks between the former and education departments in Universities.

Management of education thus exists at multiple levels beginning with the school, locality, district, state and national level. The principles and practices of this multi layered body though of a national character are framed in co-operation with and reference to all levels. Proposed reform in planning and management of education is to be prioritized around the necessity to evolve long term strategies keeping in mind the developmental needs of the country that requires a qualified workforce. Increased public involvement in the form of non-governmental and other social-activist groups along with an improved representation of women are deemed as necessary improvements required of educational management. There also is the need for the increased autonomy of educational institutions provided adequate measures for maintaining accountability and curbing commercialization are in place.
Among the primary concerns of the nation in educational matters relates to the efficient and adequate development of quality human resources. A central advisory board with the assistance of various sub-committees serve to address these concerns by proposing changes and overseeing the implementation of such changes in education. States too are encouraged to promote such co-operation among their education and human resources departments nevertheless; all planning, co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation rely on the active participation of the educational apparatus as a whole.

Training of staff at all levels of educational planning and management with a reliance on professional input is crucial to maintaining high standards. The heads of institutions need to be specially selected and trained, having quality leadership in education is critical. At the local level there will be attempts to build and sustain networks among institutions with an eye towards enabling such complexes to share experiences, foster best practices and maintain accountability. Community participation by enabling adequate mechanisms will bolster the quality of such programs at the local level.

The wisdom of several successive educational commissions claims that the nature and dimension of change in education is propositional to the resources allocated towards it. The matter is not that simple though as progress and change indeed exercise a logic of its own over time and estimated requirements are susceptible to vagaries. Though donations, thrifty community maintenance, efficient use of facilities, and higher fees at advanced levels seem like effective financial options, often they are financially marginal and serve instead to boost accountability and reliability at the local level. Six per cent of the national income was the target that was set as adequate to transform existing systems of education. The target was not been met and greater effort, determination and expenditure will be required to meet this target. Given the crucial role education plays in shaping the progress of individuals, communities and thereby the nation, lack of or reduced investment of resources into basic, technical, vocational education as well as research can have serious consequences not only for progress but for survival as well.

4.6 The physical body in education

Various policy documents and committee reports we have seen in the first section discuss the relationship of work to education. The Commission For Protection Of Child Rights Act (2005), discusses child labour. The National Policy on Education (1986) discusses the need for functional
and vocational education to improve the employability of women and illiterates. Education is also identified as a crucial factor in developing the human resources of the nation by providing the technical and managerial workforce with quality and skilled labour. In a bid to improve employability, innovative non-formal education of a flexible type that provides basic and specialized training is identified as a crucial component of education that reaches out to dropouts as well as those engaged in work. In this context, the emphasis of closer relations with professionals and the industry in order to keep a track of their qualitative and qualitative requirements is mentioned. Meaningful manual labour that is beneficial to society also finds mention within education as a means of providing experience and values that prepares children for life. Education is also deemed as crucial in introducing new technologies to the unorganized and rural sector as well as preparing for entrepreneurship and self-employment.

While work and education and mentioned briefly in the entire document a more focused discussion is necessary. In this context we shall explore a report by the National Focus Group on Work and Education published by the National Council Of Education Research and Training in 2007. The introduction of the report begins with a quote, advice from Mahatma Gandhi to teacher trainees in 1939. The message is clear, education of the mind can only happen through the body and those focused only on the book do so at the expense of underdeveloped faculties resulting in their ruin.

Advanced capitalism is a reality in India today yet around ninety-three per cent of the population are still engaged in the unorganized sector, caught up in social and work relations of a past era. Education representing the ethos of the middle-class and rich seems to function in oblivion to the social and cognitive dimensions of the lives of the rest, perpetuating violence with roots in the distant past. Acknowledging that the environment and experience of the marginalized also foster knowledge and skills, framing a national education by exploring the pedagogic role of work steeped in this context is the aim of this paper. Stimulated by globalisation and in ignorance of local social ethos, an exclusionary tendency of education to homogenize is identified by the authors. This alienation, a sense of being without any roots to the culture, knowledge and history of the nation seems to be higher among the middle class. Thus we find a situation of rising unemployment accompanied by economic growth along with a disappearance of common property. Such a development pursued systematically and over time separates work from
knowledge, school from society, menial from intellectual labour thus undermining their complimentary nature. By its association with education we now find knowledge in the straitjacket of certification, other forms values, skills and knowledge thus deemed invalid.

At the centre of this critical issue in education is the alienation from real life which makes education a matter embellished between the pages of a book. What is lost out is the value and skills that unite the head, hand and the heart. The National Educational Conference at Wardha in 1937 took up this issue of the 'fragmentation of society', by discussing the proposal of a basic education of Indian character by Gandhi. Referred to later on as 'Nai Talim', this proposal had work and the community organization of schools at its foundation. Though framed in the form of a craft, activity was at the centre of the proposed education model. Engrossed in activity the child was imagined learning a number of aspects from mathematics to history. Interestingly learning was rendered incidental, did not place much burden on the teacher or the taught, unified work and education and framed a whole different frame for accountability. Yet despite its acceptance, class and caste entrenched elitist concerns and its bifurcated implementation along with the mainstream national education system saw its slow demise in post-independence India.

The report of The Education Commission (1964-66) serves to indicate just how much distance educational thought had made from Gandhi's plan of a work centred basic education. Work is mentioned here as an educational tool that provides children exposure to the world of work thereby allowing for insights into the process of production as well as supplementing responsibility. Further emphasis is laid to its relationship in balancing the excessively academic nature of education and the social and national goal of integration by blurring of lines between manual and mental and the social stratification it embodies. But its pedagogic and central role in transforming the social on the basis of ethics and politics is not sufficiently appreciated. In question here is the commitment of the commission towards the universality of this goal, in light of the knowledge of the failure of processes of partial implementation on the basis that parents fear their children will be side-lined from the mainstream. This lack of resolve towards the centrality of work is more visible in the National Policy on Education (1986), where the issue seem to take on the character of vocational training or supplementing the workforce instead of promoting the creative, purposeful and socially relevant aspects of it. Thus devoid of the pedagogic quality of work, we increasingly find the discussion of educational quality appear in a rather abstract fashion and
lacking appreciation of its socio-political and epistemic basis. A trend linked to the international funding of primary education as well as the entry of private trusts and non-governmental organizations into the pedagogic domain of education. Moreover whatever mention is made in policy is even more poorly reflected in actual educational practice.

The thrust this paper's criticism of contemporary education seems to stem directly from Gandhi's pedagogic ideal of the centrality of work. The introduction a program for community work and social action, in this case the introduction of Socially Productive Curricular Work (SUPW) as a curricular area engaging with social and economic activities in the physical and social environment is criticized for its patronizing character. To begin with the very application of the word 'activities' instead of 'productive work' is for the authors symbolic of the confusion that de-contextualises work from education. Such attempts including the National Social Service (NSS) are criticized for their lack of direction, neither supporting learning nor imbibing the feeling of having produced something creatively. The very attitude that such activities would solve social problems or teach people something is found problematic in relation to an approach that supports learning from the community. In case of the latter case, the doors or learning open up beyond the school allowing for the transference of skills, knowledge and attitudes from a range of resource persons in the community. But the very structure of the school appears too rigid and centralized with respect to such an approach. Knowledge fragmented into textbooks, the ordering of time into abstract periods on the basis of time-tables along with the rigid evaluation parameters of the examination system are elements that form the very structure of the system. Therefore criticism of educational reform as a result of poor implementation is flawed, if such reform proposals do not target the fundamental epistemic and pedagogical structure of schools.

The very association of SUPW with the extra-curricular, a move that accommodated it to a secondary recreational status suggests that it was never intended as a serious mode of acquiring, knowledge skills and values. The seamless integration of such a program of social work into the time-table without recognizing its fundamental aspect betrays the awareness that it would cause no fundamental change in education thus in turn reflecting the vested caste and class interests in the matter. That the dominant culture of examinations with its influence over the curriculum left no space for extracurricular activities aimed at training of or evaluation in matters of the personality, attitude and values of children was explicitly acknowledged in a government
document preceding the National Educational Policy (1986). Despite this acknowledgement and the subsequent proposal in the 1986 national policy to reform examinations by making the assessment more valid and reliable of student development we find the colonial model still entrenched in educational practice. The authors suggest such a state of affairs remain despite best interests as policy makers seem to be blind to whose interests the current system supports. With the promotion of forms knowledge that are the preserve of the dominant class as well as global capital, retention in school remains a significant concern for a larger part of the society both at the elementary and secondary levels. Thus only children from privileged sections seem to achieve higher educational attainment, maintaining their dominance over natural and economic resources. This seems to be the critical factor withholding the implementation of the recommendations made by the Yash Pal Committee which we shall now discuss.

Recent studies into the post liberalization economy using data such as household consumer expenditure indicate that poverty has increased with about seventy-five percentage of the population living beyond the poverty line. With agricultural employment declining and a significantly large percentage of the population still employed in the unregulated sector where the minimum wage barely takes care of nutritional needs aspects such as education, health and shelter that are basic aspects of wellbeing are found lacking. Moreover the notion of living wages barely finds mention in political negotiations as well as discourses on development and poverty alleviation. Claims on the positive impact of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) are also found lacking as less than 0.2 per cent of the workforce is engaged in this sector.

Moreover the technological processes that are driving globalisation under rhetoric of efficiency seem to decrease the number of people involved in production. Most affected are women, marginalized and minority communities. The situation seems so bad that statistics reveal that increased expenditure in health and education seems to have reduced the overall expenditure on food suggesting the aspirations of the poor to improve the quality of their lives through education. Such a state of affairs suggests of the failure of the welfare state towards safeguarding the constitutional requirements of fostering an egalitarian and democratic society. With global capital increasing calling the shots, the authors of the paper call for new global alliances among the marginalized masses.
Incompetence among students is a well-recognized feature of Indian education both in intellectual matters and psycho-motor manual skills. Education in this sense is seen as alienating students from family and community based knowledge, undermining pride in and commitment towards manual labour and de-skilling those skills picked up before entering school. A sort of blind bookishness seems to propagate a inability towards the basic competencies that are required for day to day life. Thus we find public accountability, cultural sensitivity, leadership, entrepreneurship, communication and intuition, skills and attributes that underwrite confidence and self-reliance in individuals grossly neglected. Creating spaces that allow for juxtaposition between work and education and the varied skills and knowledge they furnish is thus identified as the need of the hour.

Some of the reasons for the inability of formal education to forge such educational spaces emerge directly from certain assumptions about the nature of knowledge. Primary to this is the assumption that knowledge needs to be explicit in the sense of being verifiable analytically to be certified as knowledge. As a base premise such a claim then forms a cycle of other assumptions such as the universal and non-contextual basis of knowledge which in turn supports text book knowledge and pedagogy, this in turn validates the ideal of a so called 'normal child' that most educators have in mind while framing educational curricula and policy. As a result forms of knowledge that are rooted in cultures of work are left out; curriculum reform becomes a matter merely of the addition or removal of a set of information. Children who do not relate to the teaching practices and assessments of a text book culture thus get left out of a educational system that forms a certain reductive ideal of the child.

4.7 Education and the mentality towards the menial
Amongst the most troublesome of concerns as a young scholar, especially one who has left home for the first time for academic progress is that of having to ward for himself/herself. This is simply the biggest dilemma that surrounds the young adult. For until now most of the pressing concerns of day to day life lay warped in the sanitized routines of the household. But the moment one steps out of home, there arise a number of situations and conditions that have to be taken care of without recourse to parental supervision.

Belief in this great moment of autonomy, in this birth of freedom over the tyranny of authority is among the crucial forces that power the urbanized development of individuals and
society. Such a development is brought into force by the almost global acknowledgement of the universal adult suffrage which serves as the basis for the organization of modern states. Thus although we are legally acknowledged as adults at a particular stage of our life, the transmission from dependent to in-dependent is a rather complex affair that merits our attention.

Food, shelter and clothing are amongst the basest and yet crucial factors that beset the young scholar of today. In a way the day to day ordering of these factors in itself seem to indicate a sense of autonomy and individuality. In lieu of the technological innovations of the age most awareness and concern for these crucial factors seem to disappear magically at the switch of a button. Yet this transmission of agency is not all that simple either.

A remapping occurs in the manner in which these factors are mitigated. This change manifests as the hostel room replaces the home. For the newfound freedom and in-dependence ironically manifests in form of access to a much larger social group that is crowded with peers, university staff, bank officials, shop keepers and a number of others. One can say that the novelty of these experiences arises from the necessity to interact with all these strangers without the supervision and guidance one is accustomed to. So it is not without reason that one hears of exaggerated accounts of some worried parents going way out of the way to secure the maintenance of their wards. Cases of such incidents are rather common today especially with expansion in the higher education sector. This concern on the part of today’s parents makes one wonder if parents were always this worrisome of their wards or if this is a rather a modern development.

For in a sense the independence of the young scholar is still semi dependent by virtue of being a student. Though it seems as though she seems has attained all the in-dependence adulthood can offer, she is still out of the ambit of the adult franchise known as work which is much valued as a mode of being in-dependent. This absence from the domain of work is what makes the status of the student so special and allows us to explore notions of work and labour as they are arise within the learning community of young scholars.

Early distinctions of labour among primitive societies indicate a primary division of labour between man and women, with the child often falling into the latter category. Such a division considered in light of phenomenon such as chattel slavery associates men to a position of status by virtue his exploits and prowess in providing for and defending his community. The drudgery and routine that is associated with the maintenance of the household has been an affair from which
he has been historically exempt for a long time. In a sense this exemption from work for the young scholars of today seems quite parallel to affordances due to the leisure class of the ancient world.

Often the contemporary Indian household too is arranged around a similar principle where the man of the house is mostly exempt from the many activities that constitute the everyday maintenance of the family. This segregation is amongst the earliest divisions that straddle the concept of labour that we see in human societies. The historical evolution of the leisure class reveals an extension of this dichotomy extending from domestic work to other menial productive enterprises often associated with the labouring classes of society.

Veblen describes the development of manners and breeding as derivatives of the life of leisure. He explains the existence of such phenomenon as providing legitimization of leisure enjoyed by a certain class of society. For such a life of leisure as a private life away from the eyes of the general public needs to be justified in a number of ways. “Refined tastes, manners, habits of life are a useful evidence of gentility, because good breeding requires time, application and expense, and can therefore not be compassed by those whose time and energy are taken up with work” (Veblen 2013, p. 655).

In common experience thus we often see labour diametrically opposed to most of the activities we pursue vocationally. In a sense it is one’s status as a young scholar that justifies one’s distance from physical labour. This abhorrence from any menial work is a historical phenomenon that covers both the Western and the Eastern contexts. “Cultures and communities across the globe and throughout history have interwoven complex social, religious, and legal webs to create, maintain, and perpetuate a manual class that performs menial, difficult, and hazardous work”(Khan 2001, p. 2).

Khan opens up his discourse on the dignity of labour, by looking at this phenomenon historically through the eyes of the slave child. In a sense his analysis reveals us to two worlds; one of menial labour and the other of mental labour and the manner in which two worlds have been maintained historically across the globe. In the ancient Greek world, all the drudgery of life, the menial enterprises that sustained everyday life were carried out by women, children and slaves. While the contemplative activities of those with access to leisure became a space reserved to those entitled to citizenship of the Greek city states. In a sense this discussion relates to the picture Veblen paints as he characterizes the earliest leisure classes and their engagement in activities of
no direct productive consequence to daily life. The relegation of functions of productive labour necessary for the everyday life of the master marks the tensions between labour and leisure as well as labour and the intellect. This inheritance manifested in ancient Greek and Indian traditions is a trend that still exists today accompanied by different forms of legitimization. Examples include the historical treatment of the African American community, the serf community of medieval England and indentured labourers in various parts of the developing world.

Following this train of thought can be useful in accessing the heterogeneity caught up between history, tradition and culture and the accompanying urban and rural lifestyles in contemporary India. The dichotomies we see play out between manual and mental, man and woman, master and slave, also seem to pervade the very essence of the rural and urban. A preliminary distinction of the rural and urban of today can be based in the simple opposition between being training in life skills versus training based primarily on the dissemination of information. The predominantly agricultural basis of the rural economy dictates that the types of vocation available for rural people are most often menial and seasonal. Such forms of vocation are not only temporary but also characteristically underpaid. In addition they involve the acquisition of those manual skills and traditional knowledge that are gained through the inter-generational experience of working on the land. In the contemporary age, the framing of such experiences come closest to the concept of ‘bread labour’ popularized by Tolstoy, Gandhi and others. The concept refers to activities that are physically strenuous, often monotonous, immersed in the physical world and involving direct contact with the soil, plants and animals. In a sense these skills can be said to be antithetical to the much valued white collared jobs that the young scholars are being prepared for in schools.

All the preferable vocational and educational choices of the day are immersed in a highly industrial and technological environment, a setting that is overt in its preference of the mental over the menial. One can characterize this modern India as a ‘mental’ paradigm in lieu of the role of formal education in characterizing the essence of both what is to be learnt and how it is to be learnt. Such relations between vocations and their life world arise on the basis of the characteristically different ways in which learning about oneself and the world is carried out in oral and literate communities. A distinction which anthropology acknowledges in terms of societies in which there
is a necessity to teach versus societies in which what is to be learnt is already implicit in their way of life.

Symptomatic of the contemporary educational practice in India is the paltry significance given to the menial as a mode of learning. The association of education with socio-economic development has resulted in a gross ignorance of all other educational activities other than those directly related to educational merit which offers the promise of emancipation through lucrative vocational opportunity. Such a trend finds ample support in both the school system, which in some cases do not even have playgrounds and parents who often extort their young wards solely towards the goal of economical emancipation through vocation.

4.8 Some champions of the menial

This tension between the mental versus the menial is reflected in the works of a number of important social reformers such as Tolstoy, Gandhi, Mao and Martin Luther King Jr, A.D Gordon and Martin Buber. The connection between Gandhi and Tolstoy which is understood in terms of a friendship achieved by means of correspondence indicates the concerns of both for the common man represented by the peasants both encountered in their contexts. While Tolstoy was the spoke for the Russian peasantry, Gandhi took up the cause of the indentured workers of Indian origin in South Africa. It was at Tolstoy farm that Gandhi set up in South Africa with the help of Hermann Kallenbach that served as the basis for the model of social development that Gandhi espoused. Among the critical practices adopted by this community was a model of self-sustenance. “Here we insisted that we should not have any servants; not only for the household work but as far as may be even for the farming and building operations. Everything, therefore, from cooking to scavenging was done with our own hands” (Murthy 1987, p. 62).

In a sense the training at the Tolstoy farm was practically oriented and involved both men women and children thus delineating any strict labour delineations. While women were in-charge of the common kitchen, such an operation was not without the assistance of the men. The example of leisure trips to Johannesburg by foot involving a six hour walk one way indicate the extent of the value laid upon such menial tasks. Moreover Gandhi comments that such acts were always carried out with a sense of cheerfulness rather than hardship. In speaking of participants in the farm who were unaccustomed to a life of labour, Gandhi states: “The weak became strong on Tolstoy Farm and labour proved to be a tonic for all” (ibid, p. 65).
These experiences at the Tolstoy farm were to serve as an important marker in the development of the Gandhian ideals of Swadeshi and Swaraj. These ideals espoused the emancipation of the individual by means of self-sustenance, as a form of achieving independence from the ruling elites. Such an understanding must be seen in light of the scepticism of technological interventions that Gandhi inherited from the likes of Tolstoy and Ruskin. Such an inclination suggests his concern for the larger sections of the Indian community which were at the time predominantly rural, illiterate and agricultural. The Khadi movement spearheaded by Gandhi thus though largely involved the rural masses of India, were specifically aimed at the educated middle class who were from the beginning pursuing the inheritance of the colonial state apparatus once the British had left. The differing interests of Indian mill owners and indifference to the Charkha by the Indian middle class serve to indicate the historical roots of the mental menial divide. So while there was a rich symbolic investment on the part of the Charkha movement, they held different meanings for different sections of the society.

Gandhi on one hand referred to the project as a means of erasing the idleness that beset rural India in times of the seasonal recession of agricultural labour. Additionally the large scale employment of the rural workforce in spinning and weaving were a means of providing at least basic wage labour to the rural poor. One can also see it as an act of gender equity in the otherwise patriarchal Indian society that stuck to a traditional division of labour. But more importantly they can also be seen as a failed attempt to achieve solidarity amongst the many conflicting interest groups that form the Indian state. To this end he tried to rope in without much success many important members of the ruling elite as well as the Indian middle class to take up the charkha.

In his own conduct Gandhi set an exemplary example of plying the Charkha. In accordance with the rules of the ashram he set up, Gandhi used to ply the charkha religiously including instances when he was travelling. Such a commitment must be considered also in the light of the seemingly ascetic values he espoused in the menial. For in menial engagement with the charkha he saw the viable option of non-violent protest. Gandhi’s crucial message was the improvement of the self as a means of improving and emancipating the other. Exemplary in this direction was his adoption of the peasant dress code. Such simplicity being the means by which he envisioned a new India. This focus on the self as a site of menial labour undertaken in the context of daily maintenance is of outmost importance to us today. For is a sense it roots the basis of selfhood not
in the achievement of higher ends but in the individual actualization of a basic daily sustenance. Such an understanding is shared by the Zionist philosopher A.D Gordon who was amongst the leaders who led the Jewish re-settlement in Israel.

Speaking of the re-settlement of Jewish community, he exhorts the importance of labour for a community that had in its recent history kept far away from this enterprise. Gordon sought to promote the processes of physical labour over and above those of ideas as a means of forming the culture of the new settlement. In a sense he considered it as an activity that completes man and allows him to attain communion with nature. The culture of ideas itself he claimed was a second order derivative that depended on the presence of the first. The work these philosophers are crucial in relation to the widely accepted pinnacle of human development achieved in some of the urban spaces in India and around the world. In posing the question of self-sustenance in the contemporary urban setting we see rather an overbearing sense of dependence. This dependence have taken the form of such complex embodiment that it has become difficult for one to even identify the labour that goes into making possible the day to day sustenance of millions.

The young scholars of today are free from the institute of labour as the only form of labour that exhorted to do is that of the mental kind. First and foremost a culture of employing house hold servants, a common practice in India not only defeats any notion of self-sustenance but is also a means of perpetuating discrimination. Many of the individuals who represent the middle class today therefore seem to have been culturally exempt from such tasks which are considered unnecessary for them to perform. But this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to notions of sustaining the self. The industrial production of basic amenities such as food and water indicates the extent to which this dependency is being nurtured in the contemporary world. But more importantly it marks the disappearance of a large number of manual skills that were crucial in the administration of everyday life in the past.

In a sense one can even conceptualize the development of technology as a direct response to traditional notions of labour. For in a sense such technologies have to come to replace the labour previously done by human respondents. Among the criticism raised against the technologists is the displacement they perpetuate of traditional forms of labour. But does not such technology come about in the first place with the motive of displacing such labour. Often in the developmental scheme of nations, we come across the forced displacement of rural people due to such projects.
Often the rehabilitation of such communities has been shown to be grossly inadequate. Such states of affairs as in the case of the development of dams across the river Narmada do occur in India in spite of acknowledged responsibility undertaken by the parties involved in facilitating such projects. When the status of such public proposed projects displace in such a brutal manner, what is one to make of the platform of innovation that displaces labour indiscriminately.

What this reveals is a definite agenda in which menial labour is sought to be totally eradicated. Yet there is a paradoxical twist in the manner in which such a process takes place. Let us consider for example the number of health care centres that have sprung up in large numbers in urban and rural areas. The hard labour of lifting heavy weights which make one perspire and dirty seem like we are talking about someone engaged in menial labour especially of the kind enforced in prison. But on the other hand it has become fashionable among the youth of the nation to regularly visit such centres in the name of physical exercise.

Among the most interesting of points in the context of labour discussed so far has been the reason why such activities have been revered or abhorred. In the case of technology we see a straightforward answer in the sense that it reduces the human effort required. In a sense this is the greatest validation for the march of technology. Yet a Gandhian critique of such a position emerges from the mass isolation of labourers that large technological platform achieves. Gandhi on the other hand favoured intermediate technologies which still ensured that the individual splayed a significant role in the task that need to be carried out. Such an understanding of technology is on the basis that it is an accompaniment of the human enterprise instead of the replacement of it altogether. But it is still not clear to us as to what were the reasons for these leaders preferring labour as a means of achieving selfhood and nationhood. There seems to be no other reason in terms of the end with which a menial labour was to be performed. In a sense the suggestion seems to be that menial labour as an enterprise is valuable in itself. But this is a position that is hard to get across to those who are engaged in the hardest of these tasks, especially those communities in rural and other distant locations.

In a certain sense this chapter provides us with the Indian context of educational praxis and its specific nature characterised by the introduction of industrial production and technological innovations in a largely agriculturally oriented nation. From a Bergsonian perspective the tension that we see in this chapter between the mental and the menial, the industrial and agricultural, the
developed and underdeveloped seems to be almost directly related to the tension between space and duration, between a ‘world view’ and a ‘way of life’. For instance the distinction between developed and underdeveloped regions can be articulated just in virtue of their respective immersion in the abstract space of a world view and the subjective duration of a particular ‘way of life’. Symptomatic of such a rendering is the mastery of modern industrial production that reflects the mastery of abstract space which is organised under the garb of homogenous time.

This is the sense in which one can claim that a modern education privileges the spatialising disciplines of mathematics and science, disciplines that epitomise what has been termed as development. Additionally this privileging of space is the reason why the curricular content of education which is captured in the abstract space of language gains ascendancy over the individual duration of students upon which it is imposed. In other words education characterises individuals on the basis of their ability to manipulate symbols in this abstract space that language provides but does not concern itself with the inner self or deeper character of individual students. This is the context against which Bergson’s rendering of time and duration can help us appreciate the above commentators and their support for an agriculturally oriented ‘way of life’ rooted in nature which manifests a qualitative progress of duration.