

EDUCATIONAL ELITISM TO 'EDUCATION FOR ALL': AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF THE NEPALESE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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LIST OF ACRONYMS USED

BPEP	Basic and Primary Education Project
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CERID	Centre for Educational Research and Development
CPN (M)	Communist Party Nepal (Maoist)
DEO	District Education Office
DFID	Development For International Development
EFA	Education For All
GAN	Global Action Nepal
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
HDI	Human Development Index
JICA	Japanese International Co-operation Agency
MOE	Ministry of Education
NEPC	National Education Planning
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NESP	National Education System Plan
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NPA	National Plan of Action
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
SMC	School Management Committee
SPW	Students Partnership Worldwide
YSC	Young Star Club
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Even after almost a decade has passed since the restoration of the multi-party system, no notable development has been apparent in the education sector.

Khadka and Thapa, 1998:i

One striking feature in Nepal is the persistence of poverty despite almost five decades of planned development.

UNDP, 2001:34

The issues and problems of education remain almost unchanged over one and a half centuries.

Koirala, 2001:14

INTRODUCTION

Almost everywhere you look in Nepal, paradoxes abound. In its ancient capital Kathmandu, centuries-old temples full of Westerners jostle for space with cyber cafes full of Nepalis. In more rural areas, traditional peasant or domestic means of production composed of 'formal, non-market patronclient relations' (Blaikie et al, 2002:5) sit uneasily alongside a nascent capitalism. The 'return' of 'democracy' in 1990 has threatened the longstanding influence of the institutions of *afno maanche* (one's own people) and *chakari* (sycophancy) (1). These paradoxes have originated from Nepal's position as a 'yam between two boulders' (2) - a small nation state trying to forge its own identity despite the heavy influence from both India and China on either side. Today, as a result of globalisation, though the exclusive influence of the 'boulders' has dissipated somewhat, far from being able to pursue an unfettered course of development, the 'yam' has been increasingly sandwiched between the pressures of conserving its traditions and its progress towards modernity.

Throughout its history Nepal has sat awkwardly between non-alignment and internationalism. Historically, Nepal has been one of the most inward-looking countries on earth. The ruling Rana regime that dominated Nepal throughout the 19th and early 20th century ran the state as their personal fiefdom, thereby rendering Nepal both politically and diplomatically isolated. The topography of the 'land of a thousand valleys' means that over 75 per cent of the population still lives in rural areas, often several days walk from the nearest road. Further, by virtue of the fact that Nepal is landlocked, has few exportable natural resources (3), and that its trade is dominated by India, significant difficulties have been posed in Nepal's ability to enter the global economic arena.

The flip-side of Nepal's status as a 'yam between two boulders' is that it is a cultural milieu where two great civilisations, the Sinic and the Hindu, converge (4). The idea of 'Nepal' is defined more by what it isn't (i.e. China or India) than by what it is, namely a ramshackle collection of diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. According to the 1991 census, 60 distinct ethnic groups exist and at least 20 languages are spoken in a country with a land area the size of Wales (CBS, 1991). The ethnic system has been rooted in 'mutually exclusive origin myths [and] historical mutual seclusion' (UNDP, 1998:8) that has often given the impression of an artificial state where caste affiliation 'is still germane to individual, household, and larger collective identities' (ibid.). These indigenous concerns, coupled with the macro-level trend of the institution of the state 'suffering 'losses in sovereignty, functions and power' (Huntington, 1998:35) has led to over-compensation by Nepal in attempting to assert its influence at the regional and global level. Nepal has

become both an active participant in the South Asian Assembly for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) and an active ratifier of UN treaties and conventions (5). During the 1990s it also became the second largest donor of troops to UN peacekeeping missions (6).

The state's changing role, both internal and external, has had significant ramifications for the education system. The multiplicity of actors and agencies that have been involved in a political capacity in Nepal, have by definition all held views as to the nature and type of education required, thereby creating a system where a *khichadi* ('pot pourri') of conflicting agendas co-exist. The goal of this study is to reconcile these needs, and attempt to explain the forces, dynamics and impulses that have shaped the education system.

Section I of will consider the methodology used in researching this study, and comment on such areas as the reliability of data and the motivations of some of the principal actors concerned. Section II offers a historical framework and comparative analysis of the Nepalese education system over the past century and a half, thereby attempting to identify the historical background that catalysed the advent of political and economic liberalisation from the mid-1980s onwards, the effects of which on education is the focus of Section III. Section IV considers this evaluation in the light of specific analysis of two schools in Nepal. Section V offers a conclusion considering the overall successes and failures of the system.

NOTES

1. Afno maanche stands for an entrenched system of privilege that has evolved out of ethnic, political or economic dependency. Negative ('anti-democratic') side-effects include exclusionary tendencies, failures in co-operation, corruption and factionalism. Chakari is a form of behaviour, the object of which is to demonstrate dependency, with the aim of eliciting the favour of the person depended upon.
2. 'A yam between two boulders' is how Pritvhi Narayan Shah, the first King of a united Nepal, described the country upon his accession to the throne.
3. Nepal's greatest natural resource is its potentiality for Hydro-Electric Power; ironically, were this to be tapped the almost certain purchaser would be India, thereby further creating economic dependence.
4. In the same way that the absorption of Buddhism from India by China 'failed to produce the Indianization of China' (Huntington, 1998:76), Nepal has had to deftly and diplomatically forge a path between India and China, 'civilisations pretending to be states' (Pye, 1990:58), whilst also seeking to create its own identity. By developing historically resonant insignia (such as the emblems of the sun and moon on the national flag, thereby harking back to the halcyon days of the Licchivi kings), Nepal has attempted to avoid becoming 'l'Inde qui se fait' (India in the making) (Levi, 1905).
5. Nepal has ratified or acceded to the following UN treaties: Economic Social and Cultural rights (1991), Civil and Political Rights (1991), Racial Discrimination (1971), Discrimination against women (1971), Torture (1991), Rights of the Child (1990) [source: www.hri.ca/forthecord2000/vol3/nepalrr.htm]
6. Source: www.un.org/depts/dpko/dpko/pub/pko.htm

I: MATTERS OF METHODOLOGY

The relatively weak capacity of government, coupled with an analogously weak civil society, means that obtaining reliable, impartial, accurate and genuinely indicative data is a difficult task. In the process of this study, the use of both extant data and data collected and collated by this author has been affected by a series of difficulties outlined below, all of which are important to bear in mind for the analysis and evaluation offered in this study.

- **Links between indicators and the 'true' system**

In macro terms, Postman and Weingarter have complained about educationalists' penchant for 'deal[ing] with qualitative problems in quantitative terms, and in doing so, miss the point' (1969:14). At the country level in Nepal, the UNDP has also noted that there has been:

[An] excessive emphasis on quantitative approaches [which] has crowded out real understanding of the dynamics and issues underlying poverty (2001b:6)

Since Dakar, targets of educational achievement have been decided largely by exterior sources according to a universal definition of 'quality education'. In attempting to first of all identify, and then secondly improve the lack of quality education in Nepal, it is important to realise that Nepal is closely tied to global 'Education for All' (EFA) goals. Thereby, the potential risk involved in such a process is whether the conclusions reached truly reflect the specific and contextualised requirements of the Nepalese system, or whether they represent the system's needs as perceived by outsiders with an intractable agenda (1).

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is one such indicator whose relevance and accuracy in Nepal does not appear to stand up to scrutiny. As with many quantitative indicators, it has assumed a qualitative measure that it perhaps does not warrant, and as such runs the risk of becoming 'more misleading than sets of random numbers because it appears to have a significance' (Ayres, 1995:9). For, though the GER of 106 (as recorded in 1991) offers a snapshot of a system at a given moment in time and indicates something of general equity and access issues, it also conceals many more issues that are perhaps more pertinent such as:

- Of those students attending school, only 38 per cent were girls;
- The GER side-steps the crucial question of the minimum definition of a school, meaning that virtually anywhere, devoid even of trained teachers, appropriate classrooms or basic resources, can be labelled 'a school';
- Internal efficiency is very poor indeed. Dropout (56 per cent in 1991) and repetition (41.5 per cent at grade one in 1991) rates are extremely high, meaning that only a tiny percentage of those featuring in the GER will actually progress to secondary school, and an even smaller percentage actually take the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exam (MOE, 2000);
- Quantitative recording of mere *attendance* at school does not reveal anything about the economic, ethnic and social divides which exist in educational institutions.

- **Inadequacy of data**

The above example of the GER raises more issues about the general nature and use of extant educational data in Nepal. Other educational indicators whose value might be questioned include the UNDP's education index, an aggregate indicator composed of the literacy rate and mean years of schooling, both of which in Nepal do not always tell the

whole, or indeed even part of the picture. To take the example of the literacy rate, the indicator's usefulness can be questioned both from a statistical point of view and from the comparative use it can actually serve. The frequent changing of the definition of 'literacy' means that a true understanding as to how the literacy rate has changed over a long period of time is impossible. For the purposes of the 1952/54 census, as in 1961 and 1971, the definition of literacy was 'the ability to read and write in any language'; the 1981 census added the caveat *with understanding*, and the 1991 census *the ability to perform simple arithmetic calculations* (Manandhar, 1995:376). Even when literacy has been quantitatively measured, its actual function has often been ignored. The commonly held assumption that 'literacy equals knowledge and that illiteracy means ignorance' (Robinson-Pant, 2000:350) falls down in a context such as rural Nepal where there is little opportunity to use this literacy. And, in a country where the ideology of education has so often been subjugated beneath its function, measures of pure literacy (as opposed to say functional literacy) seem increasingly irrelevant.

- **Conflicting targets**

Conflicting targets, indicators and measuring techniques proposed by 'partner' agencies in the education sector have contributed to a deal of confusion within the system. The EFA goals mentioned above have been expressed in very different ways in two of the key documents. The National Plan of Action 1992 – 2000 (NPA), for example, called for 34 814 pre-primary education centres to be established. Yet, as the EFA assessment committee indicated, the goals of the NPA were sated in the exuberance and reckless optimism of Jomtien and the eighth five-year plan (1992 – 1997) 'developed a more practicable set of targets based on resource capabilities' (MOE, 2000:12). The eighth five-year plan called for the rather mystical goal of 'encouragement for the establishment and expansion of pre-primary classes', while the ninth plan much more realistically suggesting the establishment of 10 000 centres. Likewise, the NPA maintains that an increase of the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) from c. 63 to 100 (2) is achievable, whereas the eighth five-year plan suggests 90. Perhaps the most startling discrepancy is in the differences between the NER and GER. For whereas the NPA maintains, perhaps rather boldly, that a difference of only 7 per cent between the NER and GER is possible (100 vs. 107), the eighth plan suggests that a 55 per cent leeway (90 vs. 140) is more feasible.

- **Bias of data**

Beyond any manipulation of data for political ends, data can be unreliable within itself for any number of reasons. Nepal's topography and transport infrastructure is not conducive to travel around the country. This has often led many pieces of research to have taken place either in urban areas, or in well-trodden rural areas (usually not far from the road) resulting, after a period of time, in skewed indicators. Increased Maoist activities since 1996 have complicated this process further, and made many rural areas (especially those in the far West and East of the country) no-go areas. According to M.K. Shrestha, a Ministry of Education official, this explains the:

Propensity of pilot schemes, training days and case studies which take place in districts near the Kathmandu valley, such as Kabhre, Dhading and Sindhupalchok, which can be got to and from in a day (interview with author, 1.8.02).

- **Political Influence**

The analogous relationship between education and power that existed during Panchayat days has continued into the new democracy. Of the 205 members of the inaugural parliament, 69 of them were former teachers or headmasters. The system of 'opening schools for political purposes and providing Panchayat supporters jobs' (Khadka and Thapa, 1998:7) has not changed – under democracy one form of political nepotism has simply been exchanged for another – 'even today schools still serve political parties as

their recruitment centres' (ibid.). The potential political power of statistics must therefore be considered when viewing any 'official' figures.

- **Afno maanche/respect for hierarchy**

The system of deference is widespread in Nepalese society, with wives often deferring to husbands, workers to bosses, voters to politicians; often this means getting people to honestly speak their mind is exceptionally difficult, resulting in a chaos of mixed messages, elitist dominant voices and brewing discontent. From this author's personal experience, research for the compilation of this study has proved this to be the case. For example, in a series of questionnaires given to teachers, when asked for their opinions about their headmasters, every response was strongly positive:

He makes decisions according to need...he has decentralized the power...he always makes decisions only after getting suggestions from all the teachers...he has good knowledge of being headmaster...he is good at administration.

However, from this author's informal discussions with many of the teachers interviewed, the reality appears to be quite different. Teachers feel excluded from the decision making process, and complain of authoritarianism; they tell of absentee headmasters who rarely turn up to school. One teacher even told of a headmaster who ran a private school in the same village and spent most of his time there.

As this section demonstrates, the multiplicity of actors in the Nepalese system, each with their own agenda and, often, hidden curriculum, makes the task of explaining how the current system has evolved a challenging task. As such, a full appraisal of the events, political struggles and socio-economic conditions is necessary in order to fully understand how the present has come into being.

NOTES

1. The deputy-director of DFID Nepal in an interview with this author (22.7.02) complained that their proposed plan of action for secondary education was vetoed by the Minister Clare Short as it did not tie in with overall DFID policy as agreed at Dakar.
2. An exact figure does not exist for 1991; the figure of 63 has been estimated from comparable 1995 (67.5) and 1997 (69.6) data.

II: PLACING THE CONTEMPORARY SYSTEM WITHIN A HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

An education 'system' in Nepal has only been in existence for half-a-century, though mechanisms for the planning and delivery of education were present prior to this. It was not until the advent of democracy in 1951, however, that what might be classified as a 'system' (1) truly came into being. Unlike its regional neighbours India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, Nepal had never been a colony of a Western power, but had rather:

Suffered...the stagnation that is a product of its specific form of partial incorporation as a semi-colony of the British Raj and more recently within the political economy of India' (Blaikie et al, 1980:187) (2)

As such, no Imperial power had ever developed an indigenous bureaucracy, administration and capacity within Nepal, however vestigial, chauvinistic and geared towards the benefit of the Imperial power that might have been. Unlike the ex-British colonies of South Asia, Nepal had no existing infrastructure upon 'independence' to use as a springboard for the development of a nationally relevant education system which was:

Built on the firm ground of its own philosophical, cultural and sociological tradition [that could] respond to its needs and aspirations (NCERT, 2000:i).

Rather, Nepal's susceptibility to regional and global trends, and its ever-growing dependency on external aid (3) has meant that Nepal has seldom been able to effectively plan, implement and evaluate educational programmes according to its own criteria and needs. The result of this has been the development of a system where parts have been 'well designed and implemented effectively' but where others 'remain in an embryonic stage and are only partly effective' (World Bank, 2001:ii).

In addition to this, the second half of the twentieth century has proved to be a politically volatile time for Nepal. It has been an autocratic state, constitutional monarchy, absolute monarchy, parliamentary democracy and a state in transition. The last 12 years have seen seven changes of government, and a multiplicity of grass-roots movements and minor political parties gain an increasing influence in the national arena. Most explicitly, the Communist Party Nepal (Maoist) now have control of 6 of Nepal's 75 districts and have the power to close down the country at a moment's notice through the power of the *bandh* (4). The close, almost synonymous relationship between the government and state-sponsored education has meant that as the needs of the state's ruling authority have changed, so have the priority, focus and policies of education. As Wacquant asserts, the school is not a benign institution but rather 'supplies a sociology in action of the existing social order and its iniquities' (1993:135); and, clearly, the educational needs of an absolutist monarchy are different from those of a market economy.

The analysis and history of the Nepalese education system offered in table 2.1 below have porous boundaries. The time-scale offered, and the generalised overview, do not seek to be authoritative but rather indicative of the dominant trends within the construct of the 'state'. Its purpose rather is to offer a framework by which it is possible to better understand both how the current education system came into being according to historical influences and developmental paradigms, and whether there is any truth to the assertion that 'the issues and problems of education remain almost unchanged over almost one and a half centuries' (Koirala, 2001:14). The table is a framework by which we can more fully understand the nature of the 'system' in realising Luykx's concern that:

Before we can say a school or a system "doesn't work", we must wade through the rhetoric deposited by decades in order to discover what it is intended to do in the first place (1999:125).

Table 2.1 offers a conceptual framework rooted in a historical narrative of the Nepalese education system during its modern era (19th century – mid 1980s). Section III will address in more detail the effects which liberalisation (both classical and neo) has had on the system since the 1980s up until the present day.

The methodology employed to analyse the changes in the education system has been to view each of the phases in the light of the same fundamental criteria: equity, access, curriculum and management/ownership. These criteria have been chosen as they are relevant not only for their applicability and importance to education systems in general, but also because, as outlined below, they are of specific consequence and indicative value for the Nepalese context.

- (i) *Equity*: For Nepal, a country dominated by the hierarchical and impermeable Hindu caste system, and which for the majority of its history has been subject to some form of political authoritarianism, the quest for educational equity is one of the biggest challenges Nepal faces today.
- (ii) *Access*: Likewise, access to education is determined by who the ruling body is ruling for: under Rana rule, schools were exclusively located in Kathmandu, the seat of power. During Nepal's first experiment with democracy in the early 1950s, the focus was on developing a nationwide approach to education, and so access was expanded to the country at large. Nepal's lack of transport infrastructure, high rural population and topography further suggest that consideration of geographical access is crucial.
- (iii) *Curriculum*: For Nepal, a country which historically and in the present has a very underdeveloped technology and communications sector (5), the importance to the state of the curriculum in disseminating a core body of knowledge to its citizens (including a hidden curriculum) has been tantamount in importance. Nepal's volatile political history gives even more reason for this to be the case.
- (iv) *Management and ownership*: The management and ownership of schools is crucially relevant in a country where the relationship between the national and the local has often been at odds. The efficiency, type and effectiveness of the education delivered in schools is directly related to who (and by synecdoche, how) manages and owns the school.

Table 2.1: Comparative analysis of the Nepalese education system: 1847 – mid-1980s

	Pre-1951 'The Philosopher King'	1951 – early 60s 'The Communitarian Individual'	Early 60s – mid-80s 'The State's Scion'
Equity	Ranaism established a strict social hierarchy based on caste, ethnicity and language, resulting in an iniquitous society where education was conceived of as the sole right of the elite.	Nepal's first experiment with democracy saw a massive increase in the number of schools and students, and an opening up of educational administration, provision and organisation to society at large.	Economic pressures, the beginnings of 'diploma disease' and the advent of the human capital approach to education suggested a more 'technocratic' and 'meritocratic' approach to education was necessary.
Access	Access was provided overwhelmingly in urban areas, and for high caste groups.	Access was massively increased, and educational progress and achievement became conceived of purely as quantitative increase.	The advent of neo-liberalism and recent trends towards more community involvement in education has implied a greater educational 'choice'; the reality of who has the choice, however, belies the rhetoric.
Curriculum	Dominated largely by India and, by synecdoche, Great Britain (6). Epistemology was restrictive and knowledge was conceived of largely in semiotic terms.	A new curriculum, creating a sense of 'Nepaliness' at the macro-level combined with local needs at the micro-level was initiated.	The National Education System Plan (NESP) of 1971 adopted a more vocational, technical curriculum that was more in sympathy with national and global manpower needs.
Management and ownership	The State provided and wholly owned the means of education.	Community involved in all aspects of education: hiring and firing, fundraising, curriculum setting. State's role is more as partner and facilitator.	The State reasserted its pre-eminence as sole educational provider.

PHASE ONE: THE PHILOSOPHER KING

Prior to the advent of an educational 'system' in 1951, the dominant strand of education within Nepal was that of *gurukul* (7), an ancient system of disseminating knowledge between the male members of an elite group. In Nepal, gurukul influenced the elite in both the religious and the political sectors. Religious authority was passed between Brahmins (Bahuns) from generation to generation via *Pathshala* schools; in the political arena, the Ranas sent their sons to Darjeeling and Delhi or Eton and Oxbridge. Both elites demanded a specific type of education that would reinforce its own power and longevity, and a kind of knowledge that would be able to reproduce itself into the future. This restrictive, insular concept of education predominated, and where opposition to it existed, it was soon snuffed out (8).

For both the political and the religious elite, the goal of education was to create what Plato described as *Kaloskagathos* ('noble and good men') and Confucius as:

Leaders [who] draw on limitless resources of education and thought to embrace and protect the people without bound (Cleary, 1992:19).

To Western and Eastern elites alike, the stability (and therefore vindication) of the status quo and the 'natural' order was not preserved through education of the masses but rather through the education of an elite of cultivated people: 'to be educated one had to be born into a caste where such an education was appropriate' (Bista, 1994:117). According to the 1951 census, education was only 'appropriate' to 2 per cent of the people – the

percentage of the population who were classed as literate. The same census reveals that upon the collapse of Ranaism, there were only 321 primary schools with 9 000 students in the whole country. By 1971 these numbers had increased to 7 000 and 410 000 respectively, an astonishing 21 per cent annual increase.

During the period of gurukul, the semiotic and symbolic application of education which was prized above and beyond any practical or ideological benefit that it might convey. Rather, it was a status-differentiating culture of symbolism and rituals that saw education as intrinsically rather than instrumentally good. Any benefit that education may have conferred on society happened, like Adam Smith's 'invisible hand', purely by chance. Discovery of knowledge, pace-Plato, took place according to a pre-defined linear path which was overseen by the political and religious elite, the 'philosopher kings'. The dangers of such a system were realised in 1951 as a people, tired of a restrictive political system overthrew the Ranas: the synonymy of knowledge and power (9), for a fleeting moment, was condemned to the dustbin of history as the new and 'democratic' Nepal initiated a widespread programme of political, social and educational reform.

PHASE TWO: THE COMMUNITARIAN INDIVIDUAL

The educational goal of the new administration was outlined in its first five-year plan in 1956 where it stated that it wanted to '[open] out to the people *opportunities for a richer and more satisfying life*' and, moreover, that it should be 'universal, free, compulsory and [adapt to] individual differences' (cit. UNDP, 1998:1,75 emphasis in original). This desire stemmed not only from the incumbent leadership's desire to act according to globally defined norms as enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights (10), but as a direct political act that symbolically buried the Rana regime. In purely economic terms, the early rhetoric seemed to match the reality as the state's expenditure on education rose from 4.22 per cent of expenditure to 6.7 per cent year on year between the 1950s and 1960s (MOE, 2000:78). For many Nepalis themselves, however, the motivations were quite different, though the goal of expanded educational access and improved quality remained the same. Rather, they saw education as a means of social improvement; or, as Bista notes:

High school and college diplomas and degrees were being used simply for the purpose of acquiring higher status...a university degree [was] considered a licence to reach the top of the social hierarchy' (1994:122, 124, 132).

The opening up of Nepal to the outside world in the early 50s intensified and widened the debate as to Nepal's potential future development. In regional terms, Nepal, 'the yam between two boulders' was caught between Nehru's modern, Socialist Utopia and Mao's ideological juggernaut; in global terms, at the same time as attempting to follow a policy of non-alignment, Nepal was susceptible to the political and economic influence of both the USA and the USSR. For Shrestha (1998), Nepal was faced with the 'stark post-liberation realities' – of the 'revolution of rising expectations' and the 'steep ascent' of development (Baran, 1973). In order to meet these realities, quantitative expansion of the system was prioritised at the expense of qualitative improvement. Whilst this served direct political need at the time, in later years this policy was to create problems as people began to perceive of the physical act of going to school as the sole embodiment of education and the development of a system where 'it does not matter what a child learns as long as he is taught something' (Neill, 1962:40).

During this period, State educational policy was strongly directed by its hidden curriculum. One such element of this hidden curriculum was over the issue of language, the policy of which the Nepal Education planning Commission (NEPC) overtly stated in 1956:

Children should learn Nepali so that other languages will gradually disappear and greater national strength and unity will result.

For Hutt (2001:311):

With the end of the Rana regime and the subsequent advent of mass education and the development of mass media, the state was in a much stronger position to inculcate the sense of ideology amongst the general population...the main thrust of policy was to promote assimilation to the dominant Parbatiya (11) culture.

Despite these lofty aims and emancipating words, many ethnic groups remained excluded from formal education, and literacy was purely an 'urban achievement' as the census of 1971 indicates – whereas 53.8 per cent of men in Kathmandu and 39 per cent in Kaski, two of the main urban areas at that time - were literate, in over half the districts of Nepal the rate was below 10 per cent (Graner, 2000:192-3).

PHASE THREE: THE STATE'S SCION

The concept of expanding educational access to the whole of the nation in order to bring about a holistic attempt at 'national development' was transmogrified by the State's need to reassert its power in the early 1960s. Failures in both the education sector and political sector gave the impetus for the state to (re)assert its power. For Bista:

The bureaucratic organization of the ministry quickly ossified; planning was reduced to acts of punditry; and chakari became, once more, the established way of getting things done (1994:124).

Nepal's first democratically elected government fell in late 1960, creating a power vacuum, 'wide-spread lawlessness' and 'political circles were at intrigue' (Thapa, 2001: 186). A groundswell of support for democracy existed, but King Mahendra 'wanted to remove it of the foreign brand and gave it our own native stamp' (ibid.:187). Regional politics were equally capricious: Mao's grip on power was reaching its crescendo with the cultural revolution'; the India-Pakistan wars were raging, and later in the 60s, the secession of East Pakistan destabilised the region further. National, regional and global instability led to the state's concentration of power through the education system. According to Om Gurung, a curriculum advisor in the Ministry of Education (MOE), the need for this was especially strong in the Terai, the region of Nepal bordering India, because:

The majority of people living there saw themselves first and foremost as Indian, spoke Hindi, and their chief allegiance was to Delhi. The government needed to change this perception (interview with author, 25.7.02).

The result of this was the centralisation of power by the state and the introduction of a national plan of action, the NESP. One of the key aspects of the NESP was its recognition of Nepal's manpower needs and the corresponding emphasis on technical and vocational education. Nepal's drift towards modernisation and industrialisation, catalysed by the economic liberalisation of the mid-80s, led to more direct linkages between the factory and the school and a more bureaucratic system of education (12) throughout, however this was done without the capacity needed to make this system work efficiently and effectively.

NOTES

1. Here I mean system in the sense of 'a set or assemblage of things connected, associated, or interdependent, so as to form a complex unity' (www.oed.com). Cf. Bista (1994:121), 'there were some sporadic efforts to develop and modernize the country during the pre-1950 period, but real concerted programmes were introduced only after 1950'.
2. Following the 1816 Sugauli treaty with British India, Nepal's attempt to pursue independent and self-reliant development was blocked as a process of socio-

economic retardation and under-development by British India was initiated. Nepal's self-sufficiency in cotton fabrics, copper and brass utensils, sugar and other goods was replaced by the forced import of goods both from India and Britain. As such, Nepal suffered the double ignominy of a weakened and increasingly dependent industrial and agricultural sector at the same time as receiving no infra-structural development.

3. Cf. World Bank, 1979:30: 'Nepal is completely dependent on the goodwill of aid donors'. For Hutt (2001:116), external aid 'reinforces a sense that Nepal is basically a weak and helpless country'.
4. The bandh was originally a *satyagraha* method of protest involving strikes which the CPN (Maoist) in Nepal have given a violent edge to.
5. According to the UNDP (2001), Nepal's 'Technology Advancement Index' is only 0.081, ranking third from bottom of countries for which there was sufficient data. The same study reveals that in 1999 there were only 12 phones per 1 000 of population.
6. Cf. Bista, 1994:119: 'The history and geography that was taught was confined to that of the British Isles and India, a practice that was to instil a sense of inferiority and ineffectiveness of all things Nepali and a debasement of the ethnic heritage of the different Nepali peoples'.
7. Gurukul literally means 'abode of the teacher' when translated from Sanskrit. Even in contemporary Nepal, much of the gurukul tradition continues through the highly influential *vihars* and *gumbas* (monasteries). Many parents, fearing the modern national and secular government school system, still prefer their children to receive such an education (Thapa, 1999).
8. The case of Dev Shumsher Rana who became prime minister in 1901 is indicative of this: after the death of his elder brother, he opened up nearly 200 primary schools throughout the country before being removed from office just four months later by his younger brother. As Bista (1990:119) suggests, 'the wary attitude of the Ranas towards education was still evident, and these new schools were soon closed down under suspicion of being instruments of treason'.
9. Michael Foucault later described this correlation as one where 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (1977:27).
10. Article 26 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights demands that: 'Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory'.
11. Parbatiya culture is the conglomerate term to describe the Thakuris, Chettris and Hill Brahmins, i.e. the dominant ethnic groups of Nepal.
12. Between 1975 and 1997, the share of GDP of the non-agricultural sector increased from 32.4 per cent to 59.2 per cent (an increase of 83 per cent in real terms).

III: Evaluation of the contemporary education system since the advent of liberalisation

Politics and education at both macro and micro levels have been susceptible to significant changes during the 'fourth phase' of Nepal's history. IMF economic stabilisation and the introduction of a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) by the World Bank in the mid 80s, followed by the Indian trade embargo of 1989, radically altered the functioning of Nepal's economy. Likewise, the final abolition of the 'rampant' *Panchayat* democracy (Khadka & Thapa, 1998:i) and the re-introduction of multiparty democracy in 1991 has transfigured the political spectrum. The increased activity of both internal and external parastatals, especially in economic and social spheres, has catalysed this process further.

The rhetoric of the fourth phase of the Nepalese education system, the period from the mid 1980s to the present day, has promised a great deal. As this section will highlight, and the following section will illustrate, whereas many of these changes have been positive, there have been many negative side-effects as well. Nepal has showed stirrings of moving towards becoming a social democracy, but the change has been slow, and, on occasion, even backward. Democracy is 'far more than the holding of periodic elections', and a society in which 'marginalisation and exclusion characterise large sectors of the population' (Bruin, 1996:48), 'genuine' democracy is still a distant reality. In this regard Pandey asserts that:

In democracy as in Panchayat oligarchy, the country has become an arena, not for the materially challenging and spiritually rewarding quest for development, but for empty debates and mendacious rhetoric on justice and equity' (1998:i).

Likewise for Dahal, democracy has become subservient to two more powerful forces that its existence ushered in, namely globalisation and economic liberalisation. He asserts that:

The trans-nationalisation of the economy is reducing democracy to being a surrogate of market forces (1998:37).

In terms of the education sector, the key question that needs to be addressed is whether the system has improved during this phase of economic and political liberalisation, and what stage it has reached some 15 years on from the liberalising impetus of the mid-80s. In asking this question, we are concerning ourselves not purely with *analysis* but with notions of *evaluation* as well. For reasons already outlined in section I of this study, the process of evaluation in Nepal is problematic due to the factionalism within the education system. For as the government on one hand points to statistical successes in matters of equity (a greater gender and ethnic balance within schools), access (a primary school is within walking distance of almost every community) and curriculum (more localised, relevant content has been introduced), Cassandras such as the Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERID) have interpreted these changes negatively as mere:

Public subsidies that are biased in favour of the elite, protecting the interests of teachers' unions, university students, and the political elite at the expense of the communities, the poor, the disadvantaged and the parents (1996:58).

A thorough appreciation of contemporary debates, conflicts and recommendations regarding education in Nepal is perhaps best understood through a stakeholder analysis of the major actors and agencies as outlined in table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Stakeholder analysis of the contemporary Nepalese education system (1)

	State	Donors	Community	Parents	School
State's perception of...	Multi-party democracy has politicised the state's role within the education sector; concomitant power struggles have only been a disservice to the majority of people.	With concern – Basic Primary Education Project (BPEP) basket-funding has been quite successful, but a SWAP is highly unlikely as the State still fears for its veto in educational policy.	Increasingly positive, partly an ideological decision borne out of a desired move to decentralise, partly out of necessity as population and demands for educational quality increase.	Parents should become involved in education up to a point, but beyond that the state has the final say. A policy of 'Reform so that you may conserve'.	Slowly changing from seeing them as places where the hegemonies of the state can be inculcated to quasi-autonomous institutions where diversity can be harnessed rather than feared.
Donors' perception of...	The traditionally frosty relationship between donors and state has thawed somewhat – e.g. DFID now has an employee working within MOE.	General agreement between bi-laterals is undermined by the persistently antithetic paradigms of the Bretton Woods Institutions and radical (I)NGOs.	As agents of change – resulting in the initiation of programmes of capacity building & empowerment – literacy classes, Non Formal Education (NFE), Reflect etc.	Though there is often a hiatus between rhetoric and reality, the ideological outlook of most donors is that parents must be genuinely consulted in educational decisions.	Several programmes of teacher training have failed to live up to rhetoric due to poor planning and appreciation of the Nepalese context.
Community's perception of...	Communities have historical reason to distrust the veracity of the state's recent overtures in the 7 th educational amendment concerning educational decentralisation.	Good working relationship as their goals and working methodology are often synthetic; but, more 'traditional' communities fear the increased power of outside agencies.	Analogous to the historical dominance of the state by an elite, members of the community are wary, pace-chakari and afro maanche, of dominance by local elites.	In this sense, the educational community as a whole is the sum of the parents within it; personal and individual agendas should be subsumed under the general will.	In more rural areas, the school takes on a political and social importance as the guardian of local culture; in urban areas, one's 'local school' is more a question of geography.
Parents' perception of...	The State is caught between the liberal, articulate middle classes who want more independence and choice, and the illiterate peasant class who do not have the capacity or cognisant ability to make educational choices.	Whereas some welcome the Western 'progressive' influence of donors, more traditional parents fear the influence of alien practices, preferring the restrictive hidden curriculum extant in previous incarnations of the education system.	Many parents, especially in cosmopolitan urban areas, see education as primarily an individual issue, and therefore the role of the community (as a geographical concept) is irrelevant.	Parents often view other parents, by proxy of their children, as competitors; the school as a battleground between participants in a future capitalist society.	Parents see the school as the means by which their children can progress socially and economically, and consequently see education as the development of IT skills, English language and exam passes rather than cognitive development.
School's perception of...	More traditional headmasters and school teachers, many of whom were educated themselves in the second, state-dominated phase of education, feel that education should still essentially be a state concern.	Schools' needs often differ from donor's perception of their needs, leading to argument about supply vs demand sided development. Schools will often prioritise 'hardware' as opposed to the 'software' priorities of donors.	Wide-ranging; at the one extreme are community schools wholly run and operated by parents or the community – on the other, authoritarian headmasters in reality answerable to no-one.	In a capitalist method of education, private schools in particular, though increasingly this is true of government schools as well, are increasingly subject to the demands of parents and appeasing their pedagogic whims.	Schools essentially exist in isolation with little or no contact between them, even in localised areas; there is little sense of a common or shared agenda.

Following on from table 3.1, table 3.2 suggests a contemporary balance sheet of the Nepalese education system according to the modes of evaluation already outlined in section II. The interplay of the above relationships with official policy and non-official influence gives a general impression of the relative successes and failures of the system during the past 20 years. Making generalisations about such a diverse country as Nepal is a potentially dangerous thing to do as many of the perceived successes and failures may not cut across geographical, ethnic, linguistic and economic lines. For the rich, for example, a 'choice' in education genuinely does exist; likewise, for those who speak Nepali as their first language, the lack of 'mother-tongue' textbooks is not a problem. However, the reasoning behind this balance sheet, and therefore why it is a useful tool, is the very fact that within Nepal education is treated as a homogenous, centralised concept where the preparation of targets, the curriculum and programmes of reform are initiated from the centre and dispersed to the periphery. As such, any serious student of education in Nepal as a whole must also appraise it in such homogenous terms.

Table 3.2: A contemporary balance sheet of the Nepalese education system.

Goals	Successes	Failures
Equity		
<p>Free primary education for girls and at least one female teacher in every primary school (Nepalese Constitution).</p> <p>Provision of scholarships for all girls in 10 remote districts and quotas in remaining 65 (9th five year plan).</p> <p>Increase of GER to 100 for all disadvantaged groups, including Dalits (BPEP II); Children from disadvantaged groups 'will receive tuition free secondary education' (7th Education Amendment).</p> <p>Increase in the primary level is 'the highest priority currently facing the Nepalese education system' (UNDP, 1998:45).</p>	<p>All indicators (GER/NER etc.) show that girls are now approaching parity with boys in terms of schooling (UNDP, 2001).</p> <p>Opportunity has been provided to many who without a scholarship would not have been able to attend school.</p> <p>Many ethnic groups have been brought within the framework of formal education, a fact which has been instrumental in social mobilisation and empowerment as well as the pedagogic benefits of this.</p> <p>Successive governments have deliberately focused an increased percentage of money at the primary level in order to facilitate this: attendance rates are high as fewer than 700 000 children in Nepal now never attend school.</p>	<p>Have not met targets in recruitment of female teachers; many schools are still failing in their constitutional duty. Still only 60% of girls attend school as opposed to 72% of boys (CBS, 2001).</p> <p>The scholarship programme is very susceptible to intrigue. The ethnic background of many of those supported has largely been Parbatiya. Lower castes continue to be frozen out.</p> <p>Despite successes at primary level, ethnic (and gender) imbalances are still significant the higher up the system you get. Pro-Dalit activities by some NGOs have created social tension.</p> <p>Less funding at the tertiary level (down from 34% to 19% by 2000) and the subsequent introduction of cost recovery measures restricts the poor's access beyond primary education to an even greater degree.</p>
Access		
<p>Increase by 19 000 classrooms and 10 000 schools (9th plan).</p> <p>The development of greater educational choice for parents who 'have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children' (UNDHR).</p>	<p>90% of households now live within 30 minutes walking distance of a primary school (CBS, 1997).</p> <p>A massive increase in the number of private schools has provided this opportunity for many parents, in turn creating a lesser burden on the state to provide education for all its citizens as promised in the Constitution.</p>	<p>The true figure of those at school on a regular basis is significantly lower, with dropout and retention rates very high. Teacher shortages have been a perennial problem.</p> <p>Education on offer has become a matter of supply and demand with true cognitive development often sidelined in favour of quick-fix crammer schools that provide little more than English and ICT.</p>
Curriculum		
<p>Creation of a more gender and ethnic sensitive curriculum that was more life-skills orientated (9th five-year plan); more participatory methods of learning to be encouraged.</p>	<p>The early 90s saw the development of a much-needed new curriculum which attempted to include a more radical and empowering pedagogy. For example, a less nationalistic history curriculum was developed.</p>	<p>Frequent changes to the curriculum mean that many teachers, especially those in rural areas and those without training, are confused. That Kathmandu and/or Western educationalists have almost all control over content has led in some cases to a curriculum unsuited to the needs of the rural majority. Curriculum has been subject to the influence of external actors and internal technocrats who do not significantly appreciate the Nepalese context.</p>
Management and Ownership		
<p>School Management Committees (SMC's) role is to 'run, monitor and manage' the school, including matters of hiring and firing, etc. (7th Education Amendment).</p>	<p>7th Education Amendment (2002) provides for more responsibility for the community in its local affairs: it promises the introduction of a genuine pyramid system of responsibility, with the district and local levels having far greater powers.</p>	<p>Weak capacity at local level, cultivated by years of State centralisation, means that many communities are unprepared and unable to successfully manage schools. SMCs only have the power to decide 9% of the curriculum themselves, which is unsuitable for the cultural diversity that exists in Nepal.</p>

EQUITY

Nepal's transition to democracy has not brought with it the changes in social equity that might have been reasonably expected. For while Nepal's Human Development Index (HDI) has slowly and steadily increased since the mid-1980s, in 1991 its 'distribution-adjusted' HDI was only 0.128 – a staggering 18.8 per cent less than its overall HDI in that year (UNDP 1991) (2). Likewise, the gini coefficient actually increased from 0.26 in 1985 to 0.43 in 1996 in urban areas, while in rural areas it has increased from 0.23 to 0.31 during the same period (3). Analogous to this in the education sector is the propagation of the idea that privatisation of schools gives greater choice to parents in the education of the children. Yet while this may be true for certain segments of the population, for the majority of the population - 71% of who live under the poverty line and 20% just above it (Bhattachan, 1999:90) - these 'expanded opportunities' are in fact 'highly skewed in favour of specific gender, caste, regional and other groups' as a result of both 'state inaction and the rules of the market' (UNDP, 1998:9). Though choice exists, it also comes at a premium, and not everybody can afford it. The question as to what constitutes genuine 'equity' in the education sector, and whether this term should be considered primarily in economic or social terms, is a very pertinent one in Nepal where such a vibrant private sector exists (4). This question harks back to the paradox enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights. In this document, while article 2 suggests that education should be 'directed to the full development of human personality', article 3 states that 'parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that should be given to their children'. In contemporary Nepal, however, one does not presume the other as the kind of school – and moreover the kind of education – that parents want for their children, namely an education likely to secure them employment, is pedagogically far from the stated aim of realising the 'full development of the human personality'. IT skills, English language and the passing of exams are prized above cognitive development and in a system where supply and demand has come to dominate, this is the kind of education most likely to be delivered.

The iniquitous, essentially economic, conflict outlined above stems from a conflict between modern and traditional modes of production existent in Nepal (Blaikie et al, 2002). This conflict expresses itself in the issues of gender and ethnicity as well. For whereas many urban areas have made the leap to modernity relatively smoothly, in the periphery and semi-periphery the 'contrast between a dignified, decaying past and a brash, effervescent present' (Murphy, 1967:208) abounds. Occasionally this headlong dash towards modernity reveals itself as postmodernity, such as in watching an episode of the American television programme *Baywatch* in the High Himalaya complete with Devagnari subtitles, as has this author. It is a superficial, somatised version of modernity that is often to be found in Nepal. At the level of the school and in education, this contrast has reached its desired goal of equity, but at perhaps a greater cost to the social fabric as a whole.

The work of the INGO Action Aid Nepal (AAN) offers one such example. As with many internal and external parastatals in Nepal, AAN has focused much of its work on uplifting poor and disadvantaged castes and ethnic groups. One of their key areas of interests has been '[related] to movement against untouchability and *Kamayia* (5)', a policy which has been greatly appreciated by the project's beneficiaries, namely 'Dalits and underprivileged social groups' (Shrivastav, 2002:5). However, through its activities, it had also incurred the wrath of many other castes and social groups, who were angered at the favouritism bestowed on these groups. Also, many were angered at what they saw as a violation of the natural order – the overthrow of a system which had stood the test of time for many hundreds of years. As AAN themselves acknowledge, the result of some of their activities has in fact been to 'destabilise social harmony in different communities at the district level' (ibid.:iii).

The mainstreaming of the so-called 'gender agenda' has also divided opinion within Nepalese society at both an ideological and a practical level. Whereas some are implacably opposed to gender equity on ideological grounds, there are those who, in the

best of all possible worlds, would support the idea of girls going to school, but because of Nepal's parlous economic condition, feel it a luxury that cannot be afforded. The contradictory ideas at work in Nepalese society cause friction at several different levels, including:

- Girls, especially in rural areas, are unlikely to get employment on the strength of passing through the education system; employment is more likely to emanate from vocational skills learnt outside of the formal education structure, thereby begging the question from a human capital perspective as to why girls should go to school.
- Even if the girl were to successfully pass through the formal education system, the Nepalese tradition that girls move in with their in-laws and become part of their household. As such, all financial outlay is by the girls' own parents, but all the economic benefits accrue to the in-law's household.
- On the same issue, an educated woman will often command a higher dowry than an uneducated one, making it even more unlikely for the woman's parents to want her to be educated unless they are economically secure.

In earlier phases of the education system, an SLC pass virtually guaranteed its recipient a government job for life. However, the greater equity and participation in the system, coupled with the rise of privatisation and free market policies has changed that, as revealed by the high number of unemployed and underemployed graduates in the country. Yet, at the village level this mentality has remained the same:

Though parents, students and employers see secondary education as helpful for jobs, the help as direct use of school education is not clearly established (Koirala, 2001:13).

Diploma disease (Dore, 1976) has affected Nepal, but there have not been appropriate policies to deal with it. Increased equity has led to more people becoming educated, but sufficient employment linkages, opportunities for technical and vocational skills development, and a pedagogy that inculcates transferable cognitive skills, have been markedly absent. The question of whether equity itself, rather than the social benefits created by equity, is a desirable goal of education is therefore an important one; synonymously, the question of whether increased access to education is by itself enough to catalyse development begs itself.

ACCESS

Throughout the history of the education system, many of the educational providers working in Nepal have focused on quantitative expansion as an end in itself. An overview of the educational activities of the Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA), for example, reveals that the overwhelming focus of their work has been on physical infrastructure development (6). The problem of such an approach, however, is that it presupposes that education is primarily a matter of having sufficient buildings – the hardware aspects – and that software is less relevant. Or, as a colleague of this author, B.B. Shrestha, once put it rather more succinctly:

If all the students of Tribuvhan University were to leave their classrooms and sit on the grass outside, where would the University then be – inside or outside?

The perception of the school in symbolic terms is one of the biggest problems facing the Nepalese education system today. In stark contrast to the 1950s and 60s, 'the school' has become a central part not only of the education process, but of communities themselves. The culmination of increased access during the 1960s and 70s has meant that many of

today's generation of parents have attended school; as a result, the institution of the school has emerged as 'the most significant transmitter of knowledge' (UNDP, 1998:75) in a country where historically many alternative 'educational' fora have existed such as the family, religion and the workplace.

The negative side-effects of this are twofold. Firstly, the added demands on state resources means that privatisation has been introduced quicker and thicker, and with less regulation than would perhaps have been desirable. Through the 7th educational amendment (2002), which stipulates a much stricter regulatory and evaluative framework for private schools, the government is trying to retrospectively change this. Also, in certain areas where this author conducted research amongst teachers and parents, the conclusion drawn was that for many parents, the institution of 'the school' has become more important than the education it divulges. This bred a dangerous, though widely-held assumption, that the very existence of a school in a community conferred education, regardless of what was going on inside it. Negative corollaries of this included fewer numbers of school days per year, teacher absenteeism and inactive headmasters.

For donors and governments alike, it has too long been the situation in Nepal that a focus on quantitative expansion of access and the repetition of the well-honed mantra 'universal primary education' has passed as educational 'policy'. As Khadka and Thapa argue, "compulsory" primary education should not be yet another policy hobby horse of well-meaning politicians' (1998:15); for this not to be the case, planners need to discover what the genuine motivations of parents and children are within education, and not simply rely on the assumption that people intrinsically desire formal education.

CURRICULUM

The Freirean pedagogic revolution that took place in much of the developing world during the 1980s, particularly in Latin America, largely passed Nepal by, with a few notable exceptions such as AAN. The notion of an education system whose goal was a 'consciousness [taken] possession of itself, not just knowing, but knowing that it knows' (Freire, 1970:454). Thus teachers and headmasters, schooled and trained in a previous age where the dominant typology was vastly different – an age that Popkewitz and Fendler would have seen as being dominated by 'a form of academic wordplay that promotes a kind of solipsistic navel gazing rather than serious intellectual work' (1999:13). As such, the tradition of passing on an 'alienated knowledge' that was 'divorced from both its origins and its application' (ibid.) has continued, especially in rural areas.

Textbooks underwent an enormous revamp in the early 1990s, largely as a result of the increasing awareness by (and pressure from) foreign agencies that the current incarnations were wholly inappropriate. Representing a patriarchal, historically stale and conservative, anachronistic view of Nepal, textbooks became gender and ethnically sensitive, and full of pictures, cartoons and practical insights. However, for many the new textbooks still contained a hidden curriculum – a modernist agenda directed from Kathmandu.

The introduction of neo-liberal economics into educative practice has radically changed the pedagogics as well as the direct financing of education. Parents who are now paying for a service rather than receiving it for free or at nominal cost, take more interest in the type of education their children are receiving; their children's education represents an investment in their future. This has led to a consumer-led, demand-driven market; schools respond to the dictates of parents rather than perhaps what they feel is their better judgement. The demand has been for 'padhera' (book learning) rather than 'parera' (more experiential knowledge). Ironically (or perhaps in antithesis to this macro-trend), this has

taken place within a context where the rhetoric has been pressing for more vocationalism on the curriculum (viz. The NESP). The three major policy documents of the 1990s emphasise the need for this revised curriculum and focus on knowledge (7).

For Williams, the introduction of democracy at the political level has failed to inculcate democracy at the school level; likewise, schools have been loathe to initiate a bottom-up approach by adopting more democratic principles at school which would filter up the system, and authoritarianism remains. Williams argues that:

A democratic political system needs an education system which teaches students to be creative and innovative and engage in critical thinking...the present education system has to change in order to make it serve a democratic country and produce people who internalise and practise democracy (1993:19).

The existence of a hidden curriculum within education prior to the advent of democracy in Nepal cannot be doubted; its continuation afterwards is more debatable. Though in many ways the hidden curriculum of yesteryear may not exist outside of the classroom (in terms of equity and responsibility), within the classroom these notions are still prevalent. Radical pedagogy and an education for empowerment have proved to be rhetoric not reality. Chomsky speaks of this when he notes the absurdity of schools being 'charged with the responsibility of teaching the virtues of democracy' when 'they are complicit with the inherent hypocrisy of contemporary democracy' (Chomsky, 2000:1). The institutionalisation of school as the repository of knowledge has come full circle and the school, the teacher, the curriculum setters have simply become a new technocratic elite – a cadre who in general terms Popkewitz refers to dismissively as 'expert[s] in service of the democratic ideal' (Popkewitz and Fendler, 1999:27). In a country where 'political parties have made schools their political playgrounds' (Khadka and Thapa, 1998:12), this is rather paradoxical. Bourdieu argues that 'the mere fact of transmitting a message within a relationship of pedagogic communication implies and imposes a social definition' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 109) where the inevitable result of this would be a form of pedagogy wherein 'learning will ultimately cease to be an instrument of communication and serve instead as an instrument of incantation' (ibid:110) as demonstrated by the ubiquity of the 'talk and chalk' teacher-dominated pedagogy in Nepal today.

MANAGEMENT AND OWNERSHIP

Many macro-level considerations as to the ownership of the direction of education in Nepal have been volatile in recent years. From 1971 until the mid 80s it was the state, under the auspices of its NESP, that ultimately guided the telos of the education system. Since then, however, both the private sector, the local community and the international community at large have come to dominate in equal measure. As for the local community and NGOs, traditionally the government's attitude towards them has been as 'mere sources of funding – not as guardians of the system as such – with the Government performing the role of a catalytic agent' (CERID, 1996:46).

The importance of local institutions in their internal affairs cannot be underestimated. As Lohani asserts:

In a village society where there are economic as well as cultural contradictions, the word "people" becomes meaningless unless local institutions are able to resolve the prevailing class and cultural stratification in a politically conscious manner'. (cit. Seddon, 2001:30)

In Nepal where there is such diversity, this is increasingly true – a one-size fits all policy simply isn't sustainable.

The international community has put pressure on the national education system of Nepal both indirectly and directly. Indirectly, the effects of globalisation have had a knock-on effect in that ICT and learning of the English language are the benchmark by which any school is judged. Many private schools are also running Western examinations such as 'O' levels and 'A' levels alongside the government required SLC. More directly, Nepal's desire to be a responsible member of the international community, its weakness of indigenous capacity, and its necessity to acquire donor funds, has led it to be an active supporter of the EFA goals as outlined initially at Jomtien in 1990 and subsequently in Dakar in 2000, even though they may not be the correct priorities for a country such as Nepal.

NOTES

1. For the purposes of analysis, the terms 'state', 'donor', 'community', 'parent' and 'school' are used in a generalised way that represents the dominant trends in existence in Nepal. An indication as to the conflict within each of these holistic terms is given in the grey shaded areas.
2. According to the UNDP in the same report, 'a country's human development achievements are greatly diminished if they are not shared by all its people' (1991:17).
3. Source: www.adb.org/Documents/CAPs/NEP/0102.asp
4. For example, while the public school/private school ratio to the lower secondary and secondary levels in 1984 was respectively 30:1 and 5:1, the ratio in 1994 stood at 1.1:1 and 0.94:1 respectively (IEES, 1998:5-12).
5. The practice of Kamayia is the Nepalese equivalent to serfdom as families are bonded to local men of influence for a certain period of time. It was common for the sons of a bonded labourer to 'inherit' this status.
6. According to JICA's publicity material, their chief educational projects of the last decade were as follows: 1991 – 1992: Project for Rehabilitation of School Facilities; 1992 – 1997: Expansion of the Janak Education Materials Center; 1994 – 1998: Grant Aid for providing materials and equipment for the construction of primary schools; 1999 – 2002: Grant Aid for the Project for Construction of Primary Schools under BPEP II.
7. The NPA (1992 – 2000) calls for the integration of skills training in the regular school curriculum; the 8th plan (1992 – 1997) stipulates that there should be an expansion of vocational training centres and a focus on need-based vocational training; the 9th plan (1997 – 2002) takes this one stage further in calling for market-orientated training and the development of polytechnics.

IV: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO NEPALESE SCHOOLS

Swornim Primary School, Thating, Solukhumbu and Ganesh Secondary School, Kathmandu

A proper appraisal of the true nature of education in Nepal can only be more fully understood with specific analysis of the actual institution of 'the school'. For, such is the gap between theory and practice that only actual observation at the unit level can give an accurate impression of the system in reality, and despite local complexities and idiosyncrasies, it is nonetheless possible to gauge an idea of how the system functions and operates at its most basic and fundamental level. One of the central concerns and problems the system that vexes educational planners in Nepal is the question of how to bridge the enormous gulf between rural and urban. Around 85% of Nepalese still live in rural areas, though urban migration is rising at a rapid rate (1), especially to the Terai, where 50% of the Nepalese population now live. The differences between urban and rural are profound, as they are in much of the developing world. In Nepal, urban areas are 16 times more likely to have sanitation, 8 times more likely to attend private school and twice as likely to be literate (UNDP 1990; Nepali times 21st June 2002, UNDP 1998). In addition to differences in terms of development, cultural, social, religious and political traditions have greater longevity in rural areas as well. The centralised nature of the system and the pre-eminence of *Parbatiya* culture within education has led to a one-size-fits-all approach throughout a land of many different ethnicities, languages and social systems.

In attempting to obtain a general overview of education in Nepal, in an ideal situation research would be conducted in many different centres, such is the wealth of diversity. The scope of this study however precludes this; instead, it has taken two schools which, in this author's opinion of working and studying in many different schools in Nepal (2), are representative of two common 'types' of schools currently in operation in Nepal. Ganesh School is a large, well-resourced, multi-ethnic secondary with over 800 students in the heart of Kathmandu; the other, Swornim, is a small, poorly-resourced, largely mono-ethnic primary with only 50 students in a very remote area of the kingdom. A comparative study of these two schools is intended to indicate - as far as is possible - how changes in Nepal's socio-economic situation and concomitant changes in education have affected the different communities, socio-economic groups and ethnic/linguistic groups in Nepal.

THE SCHOOLS AND THEIR LOCUS

Swornim school is found in Thating, a village perched on a craggy hillside at an elevation of almost 3,000m in Solukhumbu, a district in the North of the country on the border with Tibet. Solukhumbu has a very rich and diverse ethnicity and language system (12 separate ethnic groups and six languages have been recorded) that has evolved over centuries. The village of Thating, like the school itself, is made up almost exclusively by members of the *Biswakarma* caste, a Dalit (or so called 'untouchable') caste whose chief profession is iron-working. Until the expansion of education into this area, children in this area had, as a norm expected - and been expected - to follow their parents into this profession. Biswakarma are among the poorest socio-economic groups in the country.

Ganesh school, on the other hand, is to be found at the north end of the Kathmandu valley in the area of Budhanilkantha, per capita one of the richest areas in the kingdom (3). The school lies directly on an important arterial road linking the Kathmandu ring road to one of the major residential areas of the valley. The ethnic make-up of Budhanilkantha, like the majority of Kathmandu in the 21st century, is very diverse as people from all over Nepal come to the valley in search of employment and income. Though no one caste or ethnic group dominates, the school contains a higher than national average percentage of Newars, historically the original ethnic group of the Kathmandu valley, and now one of the most powerful socio-economically.

EQUITY

The very existence of Swornim school is an indication both of Nepal's past history of caste-based prejudice and its desired future of equity for all. For, the school itself was built neither by government funds nor community subscription, but by the British INGO 'Students Partnership Worldwide' (SPW) in conjunction with the Young Star Club, an indigenous NGO. Prior to its completion in 1996, the children of the village did not go to school. Though by law they were allowed to attend the schools in the district headquarters of Salleri in the valley below, many factors combined to prevent educational opportunities: deeply engrained local prejudice, a lack of pre-primary or household learning opportunities and the direct and opportunity costs of attending school chief amongst them. 90% of students are Dalits, with the majority of the rest low Buddhist castes. However, neither of the current teachers are untouchable but from higher Hindu castes. Ganesh has a much wider mix of caste and ethnic groupings, Buddhist and Hindu, Brahmin and Dalit, representing the cosmopolitan mix of Kathmandu and the Budhanilkantha area.

45% of students at Swornim and 48% at Ganesh are girls; though this percentage decreases the higher up the system you go, the near boy:girl parity throughout the system is demonstrative of an increased gender sensitivity. Though Ganesh had no data referring back to ten years ago which could be compared (due to poor record keeping and school bureaucracy), the unanimous feeling amongst staff was that gender increase had been significant and, on the whole, very welcome. Likewise, though the majority of primary school teachers at Ganesh are female, the advent of democracy has failed to increase the number of female teachers at the higher end of the system. Moreover, at no school within the immediate area was there a female headteacher. Both schools have separate toilets for girls and boys, though this is perhaps unusual in Nepal, especially in the case of Swornim, though it was revealed that money for their toilets was given by a Western INGO. One of the reasons for high girl attendance at Swornim appeared to be the fact that parents, especially female parents, were involved in educational activities outside the formal framework of 'the school' but within the physical infrastructure of the classroom, thereby creating a more positive image of the benefits that education could bring for their children.

ACCESS

In the last nine months, Ganesh school has embarked upon an ambitious building programme and managed to double its capacity. This has been both for its own desire to strengthen its own importance in the community and to accommodate the increasing numbers of students who wish to study there (4). Moreover, recent government legislation has explicitly encouraged (and implicitly expected) leader secondary schools to be in a position to transform into higher secondary schools (i.e. classes 1-12) within two years, and Ganesh is preparing itself to add classes 11 and 12 into the system.

At Swornim school, the British INGO Global Action Nepal (GAN) has built three new classrooms and a toilet block, which has resulted not only in the ability of the school to take in more students, but has also encouraged more parents to send their children to school. For illiterate villagers who had never passed through a formal system of education but had seen the children of higher castes in the valley below go to school and secure employment opportunities as a result, the 'hardware' aspects of education were naturally more appealing. Even though a suggested method of education delivery may be 'better' or 'more efficient', questions are raised if it is different from the generally portrayed standard, and think they are getting a worse deal. As Robinson-Pant notes of her literacy classes in a remote area of Nepal that has much in common with Solukhumbu:

The literacy class introduced women to new roles as "class participants" and more participatory methods of teaching, but they preferred the kind of education seen in local schools so encouraged the teacher to adopt chanting methods and mirror the hierarchical teacher-pupil relationship (2000:349).

Pace-Dakar, educational trends have been towards promoting both primary and lifelong learning. In Swornim, development activity would suggest that these macro-level trends are being implemented at the micro level. Sponsorship of individual students and the school as a whole by GAN has doubled enrolment in the past three years (26 to 54 students), though efficiency and regular attendance still remains problematic. Of students in class one, roughly 20% are younger brothers and sisters of 'genuine' students being babysat by elder siblings, meaning that parents are free to work. However, the increased size of class one, coupled by the enormous range of abilities and ages within it, and the disturbances caused by children as young as two, pose qualitative pedagogic problems.

Non-Formal Education (NFE) classes and 'aamaa' (mother) groups have been set up in the village by GAN. The overriding objective of both projects is the creation of a culture of education within the village by introducing some aspect of 'education' into their lives. NFE classes offer an opportunity for children unable to attend Swornim school for financial, logistic or practical reasons, and to give them some form of literacy and numeracy. The 'aamaa' group is aimed specifically at the women in the village, and classes act as both a vital education process and a social forum for women. Initial scepticism by the men of the village has in part receded, though some strong voices of dissent remain.

The positive aspects of this increased educational access are visible not only in purely pedagogic terms, but in the social development of the village as a whole. In conversation with the people of Swornim, this author got the impression amongst the children especially, but from the older generations as well, of a community more able to take their place within society at large.

CURRICULUM

For unskilled teachers with few teaching resources, the importance of the curriculum, and moreover the textbook, cannot be overstated. For more skilled teachers, or where more learning opportunities (books, newspapers, clubs etc.) exist outside the formal structure of the classroom, its importance is rather less; it is highly anomalous, therefore, that it is overwhelmingly the rural areas of Nepal (for obvious reasons) where textbooks arrive late or not at all as these are the areas with less trained teachers (the more highly qualified teachers often migrating to urban areas) and fewer educational opportunities. Teachers at Ganesh report that they regularly receive new incarnations of textbooks and teachers' guides on time, whereas those at Swornim (and indeed other schools in the Salleri area) report that they often arrive late, and in fewer numbers than required for a variety of reasons (5).

Paradoxically, though the curriculum and textbook are a crucial part of the education process in Nepal, teachers at both Swornim and Ganesh admitted when interviewed that they have found significant problems in following the curriculum. Both urban and rural teachers alike complained about the short time span they had to implement the 'ambitious' curriculum and the difficulty of the exams their students faced afterwards. As for the actual content of the 'urban-biased' curriculum, the differing attitudes of teachers at Swornim and Ganesh illustrate Koirala's findings that:

There is a gap between the lived life of the children and the pro-urban elitist's curricular expectations (2001:6)

To take the example of the English curriculum, the Swornim/Salleri teachers complained of teaching a curriculum so alien to the majority of their students. Unlike at Ganesh school which itself has two computers (though students aren't allowed to use them) and seven internet cafes within a kilometre radius, the majority of Swornim students live in houses

that cannot even boast a radio. Electricity was only introduced to the village in 1999. The content of several English books in this regard can, euphemistically, be referred to as both irrelevant and extraneous: the class four book, for example, has details on how to use a photocopier; the class five book talks of how Neil Armstrong landed on the moon. The teachers at Swornim did not even have the teaching guidelines to fall back on. For, despite the fact that they were delivered late, and allowing for the fact that their content and advice is pedagogically very sound, the fact remained that due to the teachers being multi-grade rather than subject specialists, it was nigh on impossible for them to understand the guidelines, which were written in a fairly advanced style of English that even some secondary teachers had trouble understanding. Everything seems prejudiced, whether through lack of understanding or direct chauvinism, against the rural teacher.

MANAGEMENT AND OWNERSHIP

As stated earlier, Swornim was not built by the government, but in 2000 the District Education Office (DEO) took over the running of the school. The community, through the YSC, still have a pressurising role to play, but no longer in terms of direct overseeing, hiring and firing, and management. The conflict between the community and DEO came to bear at the end of the last year as the community reported the headmaster to the DEO for alleged dereliction of duty; as yet, the DEO have not acted, to the frustration of the YSC.

At Ganesh, the headmaster faced problems from political opponents who attempted a smear campaign against him. As a longstanding member of Nepali Congress who had been imprisoned for his political beliefs, he was a natural target for UML opponents. Such stories of political intrigue within schools are common in Nepal.

The strength of community involvement in education is much stronger in Swornim than in Ganesh, despite the fact that the educational history of the area of Salleri is much shorter than Budhanilkantha. The community has a much greater sense that the school is 'theirs', fuelled by the adult education classes that take place in the evenings there, whereas parents of Ganesh students have a greater belief in the formal institution of 'the school'.

NOTES

1. Between 1975 and 1999, Nepal's urban population grew from 5% to 11.6%. By 2015, it is projected to have reached 18.1% (UNDP, 2001a). After Bhutan, this is the largest increase in Asia.
2. I have worked for a total of two years now in different capacities on various education projects in over 15 districts of Nepal.
3. Indeed, such is the popularity amongst aspiring Nepalis and Westerners alike for moving to Budhanilkantha that it is nicknamed 'Pajero land', a reference to the frequent passing through of the aforementioned in Pajero jeeps, a potent symbol of success in Nepal.
4. Ganesh's SLC pass rate of 74 per cent for the past year is exceptionally impressive. The average pass rate nationwide for 2000-2001 was only 25 per cent, and for government schools only 18 per cent.
5. Solukhumbu is a very remote district – from Kathmandu it is a 12 hour bus journey and three day hike from the district headquarters. Though Salleri has an airstrip (at Phaplu just 20 minutes walk away), the frequency and cost of flights are prohibitive, especially is the education department's already stretched budget. Moreover, Salleri has within the last twelve months been subject to heavy fighting

between police and Maoists. In July 2001, over 200 rebels were shot and killed here, but only after they had destroyed the infrastructure. Telecommunications are still very intermittent, and fewer flights come and go. Salleri has become even more remote than it once was, meaning textbooks, visits by planners, researchers and aid workers, are even fewer and far between.

V CONCLUSION

The Nepalese education system has endured a roller-coaster ride during its brief history. The 1950s and 60s saw the image of a fair and equitable education system appear to be within reach, only to see these hopes dashed as the forces of economic and political reaction triumphed. During the 1970s and early 80s the education system meandered through a minefield of different pedagogic paradigms without having a clear ultimate goal. The impact of economic and political liberalisation from the mid-1980s onwards has had an enormous effect at every level of the system, and while many have benefited from it, there are many who have not. Those in urban areas, in an already strong socio-economic position, and who are aware of their rights under the constitution, have been able to use the system to further their own ends; those without an educational background, and without the resources or opportunities to make use of the educational chances on offer, and who indeed are not even aware of their educational rights as provided by the constitution, have become more marginalised and excluded as a result.

The challenge for Nepal as the 21st century wears on is for the state to attempt to reconcile the multifarious internal and external forces at work. Nepal's potential future is at odds with its fragmented past; in the education sector, several key lines of fracture have emerged in recent years, and it is these forces which, if unheeded, risk creating schisms in society at large. The radically different concepts of education that have existed in Nepalese society for centuries are stretching the social fabric beyond its elasticity point: eventually something will have to give, and the CPN (M) successes in many parts of the country pays testament to this. The debate between private and public has to be settled amicably otherwise a two-tier system will emerge, thereby creating a polarised country; agreement between the state and donors and NGOs must be achieved otherwise the current practice of 'an excessive number of donors pursuing piecemeal approaches' (DFID, 1998:6) will continue to the detriment of an achieving an overall goal for education; the conflict over the control of the means of education must be settled once and for all so that the current reign of confusion can be finally cleared up. In short, the actors and agencies of education in Nepal need to honestly appraise the strengths and weaknesses of the current system, analyse how and why they came into being, and how they might be changed in the future; without this, the promise of a fair and equal education system that provides a quality education for its children, leading to the growth of economic and social opportunities and 'development capabilities' on offer, will remain a distant dream for the great majority of the people.

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