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Quotas under RTE: Leading towards an egalitarian education system?

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Abstract

Quotas for weaker sections in private schools have been one of the most controversial and contested instruments introduced as part of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009. In this paper, we conduct critical discursive analysis of the debate around the RTE quotas among key actors – private school principals, children from weaker sections and their parents. We find that the quotas have imposed a debate on issues of social integration and equity in education that private actors have by and large escaped from. However, the idea of an egalitarian education system that sees as its primary goal, equality of opportunity appears to be outside the rationalities that well-meaning private school principals inhabit. Therefore, the imposition of the quotas has led to a resistance, which is justified in several ways. But the essential arguments of the resistance are based in the logic of markets that leadership in private schools inhabit. The logic not only leads them to resist the idea of integration, but also leads to them devalue the efforts and costs being borne by those who bear the greatest risks in this experiment, the children and parents from the weaker sections.

It is hard to deny that any modern society today “relies on its schools to level the playing field for children born into different circumstances. More than any other institution, schools are charged with making equality of opportunity a reality” (Duncan and Murnane, 2011: 7). Assuming this to be true of India as well, these are interesting times to interrogate the Indian education system on its ability to challenge inequalities of existing privilege in society. Access to schooling for those coming of school age (as measured by enrollment at some point in time) is close to becoming universal (Government of India, 2011). However, access to quality exhibits a severe gradient with socio-economic status (for example see Desai, Dubey, Vanneman & Banerji, 2008). And purchasing power increasingly plays the equilibrating role between severe mismatch between aspirations for and availability of quality education. Majumdar & Mooij (2012) aptly describe the unfolding phenomena as “segregation (taking) place along with massification”.

At a time when market actors size up and respond to opportunities that this disequilibrium provides, the state has *prima facie* taken its most progressive step by enacting Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) that mandates the provision of free and compulsory education to children between the ages of six and fourteen (for details see Sarkar, 2012 and association with other government programs and policies). The quotas for weaker sections (henceforth referred as WS) under RTE and the Act itself seeks to set contours of this landscape or in more critical interpretations, “masquerade as measures of equality and social justice” (Velaskar, 2010: 61).

It is too early to reach any judgments on the effect that these quotas have had. As we elaborate later, there still remains much confusion about them. However, we find that the quotas have opened up a dialogue that hitherto the ‘elite’ have been able to *exit* from, unhurt and unburdened. The purpose of the dialogue may well be to share strategies to subvert objectives of RTE. But its value has to be understood in the context of an environment and discourse, which has not even confronted the elite and resourceful with these questions in recent times. We hope to contribute to and extend this dialogue by a critical discursive analysis of the debate around the RTE quotas among key actors. We bring in two important voices that will determine and be most affected by success or failure of these quotas. These are voices of the ‘beneficiaries’ - children and their parents targeted by the quotas - and those instrumental in delivering the ‘benefits’ - principals of private schools.

By most accounts in the popular press, private schools have resisted integration of children from WS in myriad ways, with the most egregious responses often the most highlighted (for example Khan, 2012). However, other accounts take a more empathetic view, highlighting the challenges that private school principals face:

“They must become product minting machines churning out high achievers, great sportspersons and multifaceted supermen. The principals of such schools are often under tremendous pressure tossed between the management and parents. No wonder, then they feel that their autonomy is seriously threatened by the Right to Education charter! How will they ensure quality if their student intake is ‘diluted’ by the have-nots??” (Bedadur, 2011, p. 61).

While this immediately begs questions about the manner in which goals and quality are being defined and who should principals be accountable to, a more empathetic view also perhaps helps us move closer to an understanding and resolution of the challenges faced in implementation of RTE quotas. It helps us to understand the “palpable hostility of privileged schools to their (the poor) inclusion” (Velaskar, 2010, p. 84).

Without disputing Velskar's (2010: 84) argument, that "only a recovery of welfare state and society committed to a democratic egalitarianism would be able to transform structures towards attaining higher levels of justice and equality in education and society", we seek to engage with the question: from where shall such a state and society emerge? And what hope can we have from the leadership in private schools on who an "affirmative burden" (Society for Unaided Private Schools of Rajasthan, 2012) has been placed.

We do not seek to critically evaluate the Act or quotas themselves - a task has been performed by others on different dimensions (for example, see Jain & Dholakia, 2010 on issue of finances; Desai & Thorat, 2012 on issues of treatment with existing inequalities). However, rather than waiting to write its post-mortem on the basis of its ex ante design flaws, we acknowledge the role of "street-level" (Lipsky, 2010) actors in determining policy outcomes. We also seek a more constructive engagement with its objectives by acknowledging the fact that the Act with all its perversities is a living reality. Therefore, we share Majumdar & Mooij's (2012) belief that "when thinking about the possibilities to improve the system in order to achieve universal quality education, one has to start from the situation as it is, and to see the main actors involved as part of the solution, rather than as part of the problem." To this end, we contribute by bringing the views of the "main actors" into a "public debate" that the quotas hopefully generate.

Notwithstanding some exceptions, we find that the market logic, with its primacy to money as a metric of value, is well entrenched in private schools and expressed by its leaders. By its nature, the logic of markets is exclusionary on the basis of willingness (or more likely ability) to pay. Whatever other instrumentalities it may serve, it is contradictory to hope that a system that is created to discriminate on the basis of economic resources will lead to educational outcomes that are independent of a child's economic origins and our study does not generate evidence otherwise.

Quotas in private schools under RTE

Parliament's enactment of the RTE in August 2009 indeed marked fulfillment of a 60 year old constitutional principle. Its history and what it conveys about the Indian state and society has been well documented elsewhere (see for example Sharma, 2009 and contributions included there). One of the most controversial dimensions of the RTE has been clause 12 (c) that mandates:

'private schools to admit at least 25% (of the strength of the class in class 1 or pre school, whichever applicable) children belonging to weaker section and disadvantaged group in the neighbourhood and provide free and compulsory education till its completion.'

Challenged legally, the Supreme Court in the recent judgment in April 2012 (Society for Unaided Private Schools of Rajasthan vs. U.O.I & Anr. Writ Petition (c) No.s 95) upheld the constitutional validity of the Act, exempting only unaided minority schools and boarding/residential schools. Recognizing the essentially "charitable" nature of education and intent of the provision "to remove all those barriers including financial and psychological barriers which a child belonging to the weaker section and disadvantaged group has to face while seeking admission", the majority opinion emphasized that the right "envisages a reciprocal agreement between the State and the parents and it places an affirmative burden on all stakeholders in our civil society."

Perhaps, in recognition of increased influence of private schools as a stakeholder, the "statement of objects and reasons" of the RTE specifically shares the responsibility of providing universal education with schools not receiving government funds. It states explicitly that, "provision of free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality to children from disadvantaged and weaker sections is not merely the responsibility of schools run or supported

by the appropriate Governments, but also of schools which are not dependent on Government funds."

Most recent estimates of enrollment suggest that in 2012 over 35% of all children are in private schools and that the annual growth rates in recent years has been around 10 percent (ASER, 2013). The numbers further suggest that their increased share is not simply because of faster growth of private schools but also a withdrawal from public schools.¹ The dominant explanation for the phenomena has been that it is reflective of growing aspirations among the poor, not only for education but good quality of education, to which the private schools have responded while the government schools have failed to do so (Tooley & Dixon, 2007, 2003).

In contrast to the clear trends in choices being made by parents, the belief that private schools are better than public schools in terms of learning outcomes is an empirically contested one among researchers (see Chudgar & Quin, 2012 for a recent review and addition to this debate). However, the contested nature of the evidence has neither affected choices being made by parents nor shifted the discourse away from privatization, pointing either to the difference in yardsticks used or limitations in measures available to researchers and their ability to shift the discourse. Examining trends in private school enrollment, Chavan (2013) presents demise of the state as an education provider as *fait accompli*, "Government funded and regulated, but not controlled, private schools- like the aided or "charter schools" - replacing government-run schools seems to be the way of the future."

Principals as leaders of change

Previous analyses of inequalities in the educational system such as Velaskar's (2010) leave questions about the agency of individuals, who inhabit and enact the larger logic that they are a part of, unanswered. What are the micro foundations that lead to and sustain the larger logic? If we are allowed to make the (seemingly reasonable) assumption that individuals have the ability to make choices and they do so, it is then important to unpack the values, beliefs and constraints that underlie these choices. Without doing so, we can have no hope of influencing the choices they make.

The role of leadership as a critical ingredient - "second only to classroom instruction among school related factors that affect student learning in school" - in school culture and student outcomes has recently come to receive greater attention in research and among policy makers (Wallace Foundation, 2012). Two large scale recent studies, from the United States (Karen Seashore Louis et al., 2010) and England (Christopher Day et al., 2009) provide a rich set of empirical evidence to document the role principals play in determining the efficacy of schools.

Resh & Dar (2011), who have chronicled Israel's experience with integration, write "Principals have a decisive power in the organization of learning frameworks (class structure, ability grouping etc.) within the school. Their ideas and convictions about the efficacy of integration affect the actual practices of class organization in the school. This, in turn, has an effect on learning processes within the class and eventually on student's academic outcomes, especially on those from the weaker group" (Resh & Dar, 1992).

In contrast to the international emphasis, literature on importance and consequences of school leadership in Indian context is as sparse as the attention it receives in policies and programs - a neglect that is often pointed to (for example see Azim Premji Foundation, 2011). Notable exceptions are pointers to exemplars like Sister Cyril from Loreto Convent, Kolkata - (for details, see (Sharma & Chowdhary, n.d. and Juneja, 2005) - whose transformative leadership

¹ http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-07-24/news/32828042_1_school-enrollment-primary-schools-government-schools

exemplifies the extent to which leadership can make a difference to the environment and outcomes of the school. Majumdar & Mooij (2012: 83) similarly “come across a number of inspiring cases of school improvement - cases of transition from a resource - poor, dysfunctional school to a well-endowed, functional center for learning, often led by a dynamic head teacher.” Yet school leadership remains outside their otherwise detailed and in-depth examination of school processes and institutions.

Not only do principals “have the potential to unleash latent capacities in organizations” (Karen Seashore Louis et al., 2010) but they also shape how schools interact with the external world. Even in our conversations with children and parents in Delhi, the importance of school culture and role of principal was referred to repeatedly as the principal often serves as the face of the school. Therefore, attitudes, values and beliefs of the school leadership is likely to be a key determinant of the extent and nature of response by private schools to a policy instrument like quotas and how it is perceived by parents. Day et al., (2009) conclude, “heads in more effective schools are successful in improving pupil outcomes through who they are - their values, virtues dispositions, attributes and competences - the strategies they use and the specific combination and timely implementation and management of these strategies in response to the unique contexts in which they work”. Similarly, Stevenson (2007) argues, “Effective principals in multi-ethnic schools have strong value commitments to social justice and were able to articulate these values across and through the policies and practices in their schools.”

Therefore, as precursors of outcomes likely to follow, we interrogate belief systems of a small group of private school principals. In doing so, we are also trying to unpack where the challenges to implementation of the quotas and the achievement of a more egalitarian education system lie. We purposively pick schools that would be considered aspirational for the privileged or affluent. We do so under the assumption that these schools serve as the basis for image of superiority of private schools and in trying to move towards equality of opportunity we are attempting to improve quality. Therefore, the responses of these schools will significantly determine the extent to which quotas serve to create a more egalitarian schooling system.

Methodology

The paper is part of a larger study that uses mixed methods. In this paper, we primarily focus on how the actors of interest to us – principals, parents and their children -- see and understand the quotas. The study sought to not only document views but also interpret and attach meaning to those views. Therefore, the research strategy of phenomenology-- “concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved” (Welman & Kruger, 2001, p. 189)– was adopted for the study.

The starting point of the study was interactions with parents and children, residing in slums in East Delhi, who have been admitted in private schools under WS quotas for at least 5 years. In-depth interviews, conducted with 7 children (four girls and three boys) as well as their parents, helped us obtain an orientation that enabled us to conduct the study from vantage of the supposed ‘beneficiaries’ themselves.

The discussions focused on admission processes, financial expenditure (if any), academic performance of the child, child’s experiences with teachers, principal and other students, parent’s interaction with teachers, principal and their overall opinion of the quotas. We sought to understand how children and their parents actually experience a policy like the quotas and meanings they attach to these experiences.

We then conducted in-depth interviews with principals of two private schools where these children were studying and one elite school in Delhi, known for its inclusive practices. Hearing principals describe their versions of the same experience - inclusion of children from WS - revealed both, a different perspective as well as tensions in the perspectives. It also helped us

understand issues affecting and concerning principals the most. The opinions voiced by principals on rationale of the policy, its formulation and implementation, challenges they faced and alternative solutions often shone a light on the values and beliefs underlying their opinions.

Following the interviews in Delhi, data were collected from a survey of school leaders (principals, administrators and managers) of 45 schools, towards the beginning of a workshop on leadership and management skill development. There were 38 responses, of which two were dropped since the WS quotas did not apply to these schools. Therefore, the survey statistics quoted in the paper reflect attitudes and perceptions of leadership from 36 schools. 16 of these schools already had experience with integrating students from WS and therefore this subset was asked a further set of specific questions. The surveys were followed up with brief open-ended conversations on the topic of inclusion of WS with most participants. Finally detailed in-depth interviews, similar to those carried out in Delhi, were conducted with principals of four schools with substantial experience of trying to integrate students from WS in their schools.

Although we refer to summary statistics from a survey conducted as part of the study, the primary sources of information, from which we draw meaning, are conversational interviews that were used to gather narrative material for a richer and deeper understanding. Each of the open-ended interviews was transcribed and thematic analysis was used to identify themes that would help understand and make meaning of the underlying arguments emerging from the conversations.

Delhi as a test-bed

In lieu of obtaining land from the state at concessional rate, private (recognized) schools in Delhi have had to implement EWS quotas - called 'freeship quota' - in varying percentage (between 15%-25%), since 2004.² Therefore, the Delhi experience serves as a useful pilot and starting point to probe issues emerging in integration of children from WS as quotas have been mandated for over eight years. We focus on views and experiences of the children and parents here, with responses from principals presented later. A more detailed narrative of the Delhi experience is presented in Gupta & Sarin (2012). Here we highlight aspects that pertain most directly with issues that school leadership raised and where we saw tensions between voices from the two sides we heard.

All the children who were interviewed lived in one room jhuggis (*pukka* and own) in mainly two slum areas of East Delhi: Sonia Camp in Mandawali and Kalyanpuri. The parents of all the children were employed in informal sector and are daily wagers (except one). Except one child whose parents have completed higher secondary, no parent had studied beyond 5th class.

As Mohan (2010) writes "the objective of these parent's experiment in sending their children to an elite school is nothing short of social transformation, sending their children on a one-way trip to a brave new world." Despite being uneducated themselves, almost all the parents we spoke to recognized the value of quality education and spoke disparagingly about government schools:

"mera dusra beta bhi private school (unrecognized) mei padta hai. Par in dono ki padhai mei hi bahut farak hai. Acche school ka bahut farak padta hai. Toh government school ki toh aap baat hi mat karo." (My other son also goes to a private (unrecognized) school. I feel that there is a lot of difference in the quality of education provided even among private

²This was an outcome of PIL case Social Jurist vs. Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi & Ors (CW No.3156 of 2002) in Delhi High Court- judgement in January 2004 on implementation of quotas; Supreme Court judgement (Modern School vs. Union of India & Ors) dated 27th April 2004 (Juneja, 2005) for fee cap.

schools. A good school makes a lot of difference and in this regard, lets not even consider government schools.)

However, notwithstanding the explicit statements of the act, as several other accounts have highlighted (for example Deepika, 2013), the idea that their children are getting this education for “free” is a highly contested one.

“sirf fees maaf hai. Baaki sab karcha toh hai hi. Upar ka bhi bahut kharcha hai, humara baccha free mei toh nahi padh raha jo sarkar yeh soch rahi ho.” (Only the (tuition) fee is exempted. We have to bear all other expenses, which is a lot. Our child is definitely not getting this education for free, in case the government thinks it is so.)

The ‘exclusions’ this led to, was acknowledged by parents themselves:

“freeship mei bhi wahi padh rahe hai jo BPL se upar ho par unpe BPL ka card ho. School wale bhi ma baap ka kaam dekh kar hi form dete hai kyun ki upar ka kharcha bahut hai” (only those who are (slightly) above BPL and have a BPL card can afford to send their child under freeship quota. Even schools interview parents to assess if parents can afford the overhead expenses because even they know it is very expensive despite the freeship quota.)

The reference here is not just to charges for extra-curricular activities but also to expenses estimated to be at least around Rs.5000 annually, on essentials like books and uniforms. That these have to be bought from exclusive vendors with a premium attached to the school insignia on items otherwise available for cheaper in the market, adds to the conviction that their child’s education is not “free”.³

Further, with schooling getting increasingly project and assignment based, even academic work implied increased out of pocket expenditure. For example, ‘internet based homework’ that requires children to refer to internet and frequently get print outs, is among the biggest sources of expenditure. As these children don’t have a computer at home, they access it through cyber cafes where they spend Rs.20 for half-an-hour of usage and a further Rs.2-5 per page for printing. Besides these expenses, most parents were also spending on transportation to school and Rs.200-400 per month on tuitions. Sought to be outlawed by the RTE and desisted by principals, the tuition expenditure was considered necessary by parents. This was despite the appreciation that many parents had for extra attention their child got from teachers. In many cases, the tuition teacher was not only substituting for the academic help found in more privileged houses but also helping parents negotiate the formal school system by helping them read and understand notes in school diary and other notices sent by the school. However, given the difficulties in finding capable help in the slums, tuitions often led to additional transportation costs as well. Somewhat counter intuitively, a parental remark explained the complementary nature of the two: *“Accha school hai to tuition bhi mehengi wali bhejni padti hai.”* (Since the child is going to a good school, we have to send her/him to an expensive tuition class.)

Estimates of annual school related expenditure ranged from Rs.12,000 to Rs.15,000, and we were told that this was despite not being able to participate in most extra-curricular activities, with non-participation being a point of great dissatisfaction for the children. The “optional”

³ We were told that although there is a provision to be reimbursed Rs 500-600 every year for books, they obtain it only if the school sends the list of EWS students. With little in it for them, more often than not the schools avoid the additional paper work.

extra-curricular activities included classes for sports, arts etc., field- trips as well as activities like annual days that required additional expenditure for supplies, costumes, travel etc. Although children acknowledged that these activities are not mandatory, they also pointed to the fact that all other children enrolled and therefore wondered how they could be considered non-compulsory. While children participated in some, it was clear that there were many activities in which they could not. Describing the conflict created, an elder sister spoke of her younger sibling's reaction:

“yeh toh bahut roti hai agar mana kar dein. Isko sharam aati hai ki class ke sab bacche chale jaayenge aur yeh reh jayegi.” (She cries a lot if we say no (for expenditure on extra-curricular activity). She feels embarrassed on being the only one left out.)

A fact quickly acknowledged by the student, *“didi bahut sharam aati hai aise”* (I feel very embarrassed in such cases.)

Admissions to their respective schools under the quotas had not been easy. Many have had to overcome obstacles beginning from being physically denied entry to the school, to being discouraged to apply, to negotiating the government bureaucracy for necessary certificates and then finally being the lucky winners of draws.

The threat of state bureaucracy hangs over even after admissions. Although rules prohibit it, parents of one of the children we were interviewing had received a notice from the school asking them to submit an income certificate within a week or else face cancellation of the child's admission under 'freeship' quota. However, to keep a cap on the number of Below Poverty Line (BPL) card holders in the state, government offices responsible for the income certificates were refusing to provide them with a certificate for an income below Rs.6000 month. Unknown to them, accepting this certificate would make them ineligible for subsidized access to the Public Distribution System (PDS) that avail currently. Although, timely information from a social worker and the use of the Right to Information saved them from the predicament. Subsequently, their experience highlights the challenges parents face on a continuous basis to keep their children in these privileged schools. Moreover, the parents now suspect that their child is being harassed at school for challenging its authority.

The children's experiences are not uniform and vary across and within schools. From our conversations, it appeared that children performing better academically were also ones who were treated better - with the direction of causality not clear.

The experience of feeling different because of their social backgrounds seemed to affect the younger children less or they are unable to articulate it. Besides narrating incidents of being teased by classmates, the two oldest children in our group - studying in 9th - spoke of having to stand in class and be publicly identified each time list of 'freeship' students have to be made or any cheques to be distributed. However, even the slightly younger children observed that if a child is dressed clumsily, the teachers often passed remarks like, *“tum slum ke bacche ho kya”* (are you a child from slum?), and if anyone misbehaved, *“tum mandawali (a nearby notorious slum area) se aaye ho”* (do you belong to Mandawali (a nearby notorious slum area)).

The parents of WS children are clearly unequal participants in their child's education. They wished that notices and notes in school diaries were in Hindi. And felt hesitant in the parent-teacher meetings, since they don't understand English. One parent had been explicitly warned at the time of admission to not fight and bring complaints to principals or teachers. Some of the children themselves felt shy in taking their parents and one parent complained that her child had stopped taking her to the parents-teachers meeting by not informing her timely.

Despite complaints and challenges, we heard more voices acknowledging the opportunity that

quotas presented. We repeatedly heard examples of children availing 'freeship' quotas knowing more and behaving better.

"humane apni baaki ladki sarkari mei padhai hai. Humein farak dikhta hai. Sonam acchi batein seekh rahi hai. Usko aaj ke zamane ka computer aur English aata hai. Sarkari ke bacche bhavishya ke bare mei soch hi nahi sakte." (Our other daughters have studied in government schools and we can see the difference. Sonam talks more intelligently. She knows how to use computer and speak English, which is essential in today's world. Children who go to government schools cannot even think of a future.)

Two of the children we spoke to were toppers in their respective classes. For many, including the youngest, there was a strong desire to prove a point.

"Pehle toh school walon ne bahut daraya ki nahi adjust kar paaoge private school mein. Admission mat lo. Par maine unko galat sabit kar diya. Sab teacher mujhe ab pyar karti hai." (While getting the admission, school authorities tried to scare me that I won't be able to cope up and therefore, don't take admission. But I proved them wrong. Now all the teachers love me.)

But when asked about the far future, one mother responded, *"Engineer, doctor toh fir bhi koi nahi ban payega. Ma baap coaching ki fees kahan se layenge. Sirf quota se sab kuch nahi hota."* (Despite these quotas, none of them can become engineer or doctor. Parents cannot afford the expensive coaching that is required. Quotas alone doesn't assure anything.)

Survey Data and nature of RTE implementation in sample schools

On no dimension can our sample be considered statistically representative. There is also a clear 'bias' as the represented schools had elected and sent participants to a leadership course. Therefore, it is quite possible that there is a bias in our small sample towards financially better-off schools wishing to learn from contemporary practices and engage with ideas emanating from academia.

Acknowledging these limitations, the survey provides us with quantitative measures on an issue of importance from a sample that does appear to span a reasonable spectrum of schools and school leadership on several dimensions. 47% of the respondents are females. 31% of the school leaders had 11 years of experience or more. 33% had 6-10 years and 19% had 3-5 years of experience, while 4 principals had less than one year of experience. Gujarat, Maharashtra, Orissa and Punjab together constituted 47% of the schools in the sample. Besides this, there were two schools each from West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and Delhi and one each from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka and Uttarakhand. All the schools identified themselves as unaided recognized private schools. 17% of the schools charged an annual fee less than Rs.10,000 in the 10th standard, while 43% charged more than Rs.30,000. The highest fee charged was Rs.1,84,000.

Out of the total 36 schools, eight have been implementing quotas for WS children since more than a year and another eight have just started within the last year. Three schools plan to start it in the next academic year and 11 said that they have not received any notification, while one is exempted. Three schools explicitly mentioned that they do not want to implement this quota. 16 schools said that they admitted children from WS in varying proportions on their own accord prior to the RTE. Several schools gave scholarships or fee concessions and some also had a parallel shift of school exclusively for children from WS. Few schools also had remedial classes for these children.

Out of the 16 schools that claimed to have implemented RTE, three schools had allocated less than 15% seats for WS children and two said that percentage of seats vary with the rest having allocated the required 25%.

11 schools said that they admit children on first come first serve basis and if the number exceeds then they do a luck draw. While 5 said that they conduct an entrance exam for the child, out of which two also said that they interview parents as well. 12 schools also said that they don't receive any kind of reimbursement/ subsidy/ grant from either government or any private source. While three schools receive partial subsidy/ grant from the government and one receives it through private sources. Although, only one school explicitly said that they received tax exemption and subsidy on land procurement price, a few others admitted, during conversations, to have procured the land on subsidized rates. Besides the grant/ subsidy received by the schools, only one school said that the children receive partial reimbursement for books and uniforms from the government. According to the Act, the school is entitled to reimbursement of the fee (per child expenditure as incurred by the school or the state, whichever is less) and the child is entitled to reimbursements for books and uniform as per the mandate of the state, though facilitated by the school itself.

We also asked the schools regarding the adjustments (including changes in pedagogy) that they have made in order to include children from varied backgrounds and abilities, especially with reference to children from WS. 10 schools have brought changes in methods of communicating with parents of children from WS, including arranging counseling for these parents and students. 9 schools said that they have subsidized the overhead costs for children from WS. 7 schools also arranged training for their teachers in order to help them in teaching children with different abilities and social backgrounds within the same classroom.

Only 4 schools have made changes in their classroom pedagogy and another 5 said that they are considering it. Majority of them continue to apply their 'one size fits all' teaching methodology in the classroom. Only 8 schools have started conducting extra classes. 5 schools also said that they are planning to make separate sections based on student's academic abilities.

Response to the quotas: Voices of leadership

An unwelcome policy from a distrusted State: "What does the government know about education and children?"

"Since, it is forced upon us, we have to do it but our heart is not completely for it" might be one of the more favourable views on the policy we heard from principals. This is despite the fact that 82% (28/34) principals felt that WS quotas are a "much needed step". Albeit a slight minority, 47% (15/32) principals said that even private schools should share the responsibility of teaching WS children and a rather smaller fraction feeling that it was exclusively the responsibility of government schools. However, these numbers are more indicative of agreement with the policy goals and are not indicative of the discontent we heard on account of the policy process, perceived motives and abilities of the state.

One of the key sources of discontent is the manner in which principals perceived the way quotas had been implemented, with "no proper planning", "forced upon, almost overnight, without any consultation or notification and leaving us struggling for proper information". Discontent on being reduced to passive participants, was often accompanied by expressions of distrust and lack of confidence in state's intentions and motives behind the policy. Some felt used by politicians "for their vote bank politics" or "one man's agenda (because of) personal unfulfilled aspirations". The characterization that "government is coming up with experimental policies without understanding the reality and damage it can cause to the child" was one we heard often with even those supportive of the quotas, seeing it as an attempt by an incompetent state passing on its responsibility by exercising its authority on private schools.

Referring to lack of faith in the government's ability in the arena of education, one of the principals asked, "why is the government implementing WS quota, when government schools are empty despite their teachers being paid the highest salaries?" Another saw quotas as "government's attempt to dilute the standard of private schools as they have failed to improve the standard of their own schools."

Corruption, that is typically associated with any government program, also serves to discredit the ability of the state to implement policies to achieve its goals. Explaining the arbitrage opportunities created, "If you have all the papers, we have to include you in the draw (for selection under the quota) and how difficult is it in India to get fraudulent papers made. Pay a little bribe and you have to pay no fees for your child."

The discontent is further exacerbated by a perception that mandates are being implemented non-uniformly with the confidence that recourse to bribes always exists. Lack of faith in the institutional structure leads to cynicism or confidence that its business as usual, "It is as each individual considers right. Some are admitting 10% and some 25%. It's a cycle (of corruption). There is no hope for India. Let it be the way it is".

Question of resources: "Who will pay for these children? We cant!!"

Private schools, or those speaking on their behalf, have often highlighted issues of funds and resources in the popular media. Similarly there is an overwhelming agreement among the surveyed principals that it is the government that should pay for the costs of this action, with over 82% of them agreeing/strongly agreeing. Not surprisingly, some of the principals we spoke to complained, "these children sap all the energy and resources of the school."

The Act (clause 12 (2)) mandates the government to reimburse private schools an amount equal to either the per-child expenditure incurred by the state or the actual amount charged by the school, whichever is less. However, as one principal expressed her concern and dissatisfaction, this is clearly not enough:

"They (government) haven't really thought through it. The government has left everything on the school. Who will pay for these 25% children? Ultimately the parents of the fee-paying children and as the number of these 25% children keeps increasing, there will be so much pressure on the parents of the paying children that it will be impossible to sustain 25% non fee-paying children."

Asked to rate problems that they anticipate or are currently facing in integrating WS children, 46% (16/35) rated 'financial constraints' as a 'major'⁴ problem. A similar proportion (14/34) likewise said that infrastructural constraints are also a 'major' problem. 82% (28/34) principals said that government should bear the financial burden from imposition of quotas for WS students, with quite a few principals calculating the 'loss' that the school incurred due to admission of non-fee paying children during their conversations with us.

The costs that schools actually incur in educating children are usually opaque and estimates at the per-child level are subject to many unverifiable assumptions. They get further complicated by the fees schools charge for extra-curricular activities (for example educational/recreational trips), which are considered 'optional'. In 14 of the 36 schools, parents usually have to spend

⁴On a scale of 1 (Not a problem) to 5 (Major Problem), respondents were asked to evaluate the magnitude of the problem that they anticipate or already faced regarding inclusions of children from the weaker sections. Ratings of 4 and 5 have been clubbed together and labelled as 'major' problem here and elsewhere.

more than Rs.5,000 per year for these 'other' activities, besides the regular fees, including two schools where this cost is greater than Rs.30,000.

Explaining their "constraints", an elite private school principal asked, *"We hire an event management company to organize student's trips and picnics. Why will they not charge for WS children?"* Another principal said, *"Parents are already paying for the education of these non-paying children but I can't ask them to fund their picnics and pleasure trips as well."* Acknowledging the implications, the principal added, *"Ofcourse these children feel left out. Despite studying in the same class, this child will still be an outcast."*

Citing infrastructure constraints as a 'major' problem to integration is positively and significantly correlated with the "special fees" (amount that the school charges on occasional overhead costs like picnics, costumes, extra-curricular activities, education trips), even though optional. Controlling for their regular fees, schools charging annual special fees of Rs.5,000 or more were 56% points more likely to cite infrastructure constraints as a major problem.

The issue of resources is further compounded by the reluctance of many schools to engage with the government. Of 16 schools that had already implemented the RTE, only three received partial reimbursement from the government with most preferring not to. Reasons cited for the reluctance included dealing with paperwork and fear of coming under the purview of Right To Information.

Academic competency and motivation

Although exceptions were often mentioned, during interviews principals often referred to WS children as "slow learners". 37% (13/35) principals said that WS children are very often or always weak in studies and 43% (15/35) believed that they lacked interest in studies. Further, since almost all schools used English as the medium of instruction, competence in language was another significant area of concern, with 77% (27/35) believing that WS children have difficulty in learning English, always or very often.

These and other reasons often served as explanations for the increased "burden" on teachers - *"teachers are very troubled because of the WS children as they are slow learners as well as the most mischievous (read delinquents) in the class"* - with only 11% of the principals stating that the teachers feeling overburdened, as a result of quotas, was not a problem they faced or anticipated.

This increased "burden" was also often attributed to lack of support at home. 77% (27/35) principals said that WS children lack parental involvement and a similar number also believed that their family atmosphere is very often or always not conducive to studies, leading some principals to ask, *"How will the child cope (with the academic requirements)? We cannot take care of this child when he is at home"*.

Academic concerns, like those mentioned above, were often juxtaposed with the effect it had on their 'good' children. As one principal said, *"At present, our good children are suffering because WS children are slow and as a result teacher has to slow down the pace which means she is unable to finish the syllabus on time."* This was a feeling echoed in our survey, where 61% of principals felt that slowing down of the pace of the class as a result of inclusion of children would be a 'major' problem.

Unbridgeable Social Distances

"Social integration is the biggest challenge that these children face. They just cannot adjust. What they wear, how they speak, what they get in lunch, where do they go for vacation, which car comes to drop them, all of this makes an impact on child's

psychology. We don't understand that how significant these things are for children. We can keep the child here only for 6 hours, the rest of the 18 hours the child is back at his home (slum environment). Despite studying in the same class, this child will still be an outcast. We should not make the child go through this emotional trauma."

The social distance that separates children belonging to WS from their privileged counterparts is unbridgeable, according to principals like the one quoted above. While some attributed this largely to social backgrounds of children being integrated, others more reflectively characterized the issue as *"neither can they connect with us nor can we"*. Some spoke about problems it creates for the class as whole, asking, *"What if other children don't want to sit with them? It brings disharmony to the class"*. Others, like the principal quoted above and below, represented it as protecting interests of the children being integrated.

43% (15/35) said that WS children very often or always have problem in relating to their classmates and a similar proportion felt the same about discipline related issues being a 'major' problem they anticipate from inclusion of WS children. 31% (11/35) felt that EWS children use abusive language very often or always, as a principal described:

"They behave like hooligans and often engage in stealing and using abusive language. 'Our' children don't want to sit with them and our teachers come and cry in front of us because of them."

While some principals blamed the behaviour on integration itself, others often ended by rationalizing it along the lines of, *"It is their habit. This is what they learn from their environment."* For instance, one principal described how the temptations created by integration would make thieves of the children being integrated.

"Aur bataun mai aapko - jo very low class ke bacche hote hain na woh chori bhi karte hai class mei, kabhi kitaab chura li ya kabhi pencil chura li. Bacche mei bhi toh feeling aate hai ki mai yeh acchi acchi cheezein nahi le sakta. Doosre bacche mehngi wali stationary lekar aate hai. Fir aise yeh WS ke bacche chori bhi karne lagte hai. This is how these children learn to steal which leads to big thefts when they grow up" (I will tell you - child from 'low' (poor) class steal things from their classmates, like notebook or pencil. The child feels that why can't s/he buy such expensive stationary like others in the class. Then these children start stealing from classmates. This is how these children learn to steal which leads to big thefts when they grow up.)

However, these perceptions are not necessarily universally shared and there is more diversity on views than is popularly represented.

For example, 25% of principals felt that WS children stole from classmates very often or always. However, a larger (43%) proportion felt that this was rarely or never the case. Similarly while a majority (52%) opined that WS parents were rarely or never difficult to deal with, 33% stated that this was the case very often or always.

Most principals in schools that already had quotas for WS children claimed that nobody explicitly identified these children about their background but other children were able to "figure out". Others referred to practices in their schools that accentuated the differences, without necessarily seeing the practices as problematic. For example, the principal quoted above on social integration, explained:

"It is compulsory by the school that the birthday child has to invite everyone from his/her class for his/her birthday party so everyone gets the invitation. But the difference is so apparent at such events that this affects the child drastically. This child will have to think

about what to wear, what to take as gift, how to go etc. so why make this child go through the trauma.”

She added:

“These children don’t even have computer at home. We have decided to save paper and therefore send all the circulars and notes by emails to parents. How will parents of these children read emails? This is also an issue for us.”

Another principal was willing to attribute the problems more to their ‘usual’ children, but given their inability to do anything, felt that children from WS would be better off not being integrated into their schools.

“Even my own children don’t want to come to my school, because they feel that our school children are very snobbish. Yes, they are and what do I do. Their parents prefer them that ways. I can only do small things like I told them not to get tetra pack juices to school because others also start demanding. But otherwise you can’t do much. I am telling you that the (WS) children can’t survive for more than 6 months in our school. Even if they do, they will get more damaged than learn anything. They will not be able to fit into the system. Their parents won’t fit in, so they will be psychologically shattered. The child will never be a part of the system. I can say this with 100% surety.”

Consistent with the idea of lack of autonomy (Bedadur, 2011), principals explained that it is not necessarily about what they want but what parents (of fee paying children) allow/ want and 40% of the principals feel that resistance from parents of fee paying children is a ‘major’ problem while anticipating *“Even the parents of fee paying children will retaliate. We will have to work on that front as well”*.

Devaluing “quality” education

Despite supporting the overarching objectives of the quota, majority of principals that we talked to believed that the quotas are not only likely to be ineffective as an instrument for integration but also detrimental to the quality of education that private schools are known for. Not surprisingly, 20 (out of 34) principals said that it is wrong in principle to impose quotas on private schools and only 9 disagreed.

64% of principals agreed/strongly agreed that fee paying children also have a great deal to learn from children belonging to WS and 72% similarly believed that integration enhanced interaction across social groups. However, a minority - 47% believed that benefits to integrated children more than compensated for any losses to fee paying children.

As is often argued in case of any affirmative action, a large number of principals feel that WS quota is devaluing school admissions (referred to as *“lowering of quality”* by them) as their seats are being given away to the *“undeserving”* and *“ungrateful”*. Therefore, the devaluation that principals spoke about has two dimensions. The first is the effect that integration has on the image of the school and the second is diminishing of value attached to the perceived privilege of being a part of their school.

A typical characterization of the issue of the adverse effect on the school image was as follows:

“Fir yeh bacche mix up nahi ho paate acche bacchon ke saath. Yeh log gali dete hai, safai se nahi rehte, toh school ka naam bhi kharab hota hai. Parents bolte hai ki is school mei toh jhuggi ke bacche aate hai. School ka environment kharab hota hai. School’s reputation is on stake.” (These (WS) children can’t adjust with our good (fee paying) children. They use foul language, look dirty and as a result, schools reputation gets spoilt. Parents (fee paying) start thinking that this

school admits children from slums. It spoils the school environment. So the school's reputation is at stake.)

Principal of the most elite school we spoke to asked, "*which parent would send their child to a school where their maid's child is also studying in the same class?*" However, in the survey itself, principals were dismissive of the idea that the adverse effects on the school image were a problem, with 47% claiming this was not a problem at all.

Several principals strongly believed that parents of WS children don't value the 'opportunity', since they see a place in their school as a right and not a privilege. The same principals that complained of the background of WS children, complained that parents come and pick fights when they should instead be feeling obligated towards them. For example:

"The parents of WS children are very high headed. They come to us as if it is their right to get admission in our school. As if school is obliged to serve them and impress them. They are very ungrateful to the school. We are doing so much for them and even then they are hardly thankful. But we still don't want to harm the child."

Along similar lines, a principal complained, "*Jo pehle haat jhod kar aate the ab who haq se seat mangte hai. Isse value khatam ho jata hai.*" (Those who earlier used to come pleading to us, now demand a place in our school as a right. This finishes the value of a place (admission) in our school.)

The idea that since parents are not paying the fees, they did not value education was brought up in different ways. In a school that starts from the second year of kindergarten, the principal complained about lack of preparedness among students from WS. The suggestion by their parents to allow their children to repeat a year to make up for this lack of preparedness was taken as a sign of their callous attitude since they don't have to bear the "costs" of attending school. ("*Parents kehte hain ma'am do saal UKG mein baitha do to seekh jayenge. Parents bhi illiterate hote hain, to kaise samjhayein. Parents ko kitna bhi samjha lo nahi samajht. Aur fees to maaf hai hi to toh koi farak hi nahin padta parents ko.*")

Suggested solution: Separate but "equal"

"We (private schools) are proposing a separate afternoon/ parallel school where WS children can use the school's resources and infrastructure. We will appoint teacher/s also. We think this is a better solution."

"A separate school where teachers belonging to their background will be appointed and then they will flourish."

Almost all the principals we interviewed proposed a separate afternoon/ parallel shift only for disadvantaged children as an alternate and better solution. In fact, schools may be moving in this direction already. One of the principals said that they are considering making a separate section for WS children for better classroom management. Another described having separate parents-teacher meetings, "*as it is difficult to talk to them and it is better for other (fee-paying) parents.*"

Most principals also argued that 25% is a very high number and it must be lowered, "*the lower the better*". Some principals argued that government should allow them to integrate students from WS according to their own norms and regulations. For instance principal pointed to 'various scholarship schemes like scholarship for disabled, single parent/ fatherless child, meritorious child from WS background' supported by the school's foundation prior to the RTE, which they have now discontinued as a result of the mandate. Another principal spoke of

government allowing private schools to manage government schools under “Public Private Partnership” instead of the quota.

An alternative vision: An Integrated “Public” School

Ranked as one of the “top-10 schools in East Delhi” with nearly 250 students from WS now studying in it, the school had first come to our attention during our interviews in Delhi when children and their parents going to this particular school, reported the principal as well as teachers as being very accessible, approachable and helpful. The only children who had told us that their teacher did not call out their names openly in class to make a list of WS children belonged to this school. Children had also mentioned going for picnics as well as participating in extra-curricular activities without their parents having to pay.

Fortuitously, the principal of this school was a participant in the program where we conducted the survey and more detailed interviews. Our conversation with the principal, which was without any reference to our interactions with the children and parents, revealed a stark difference in his perspective vis-à-vis other principals. Arguing that “*Schools are a place where values are created, nation building and character building (occur)*”, he strongly believed that “*we must do this quota. I feel that we can really make a change in that child’s life through the six hours that he is with us.*” The WS children in the school were differentiated, but in a positive way, “*Sometimes I am more conscious with these children. Because they are vulnerable, they shouldn’t think that principal doesn’t talk to us. These children are very sensitive to such issues.*”

The principal explained that after the Supreme Court verdict in 2012 (discussed earlier), the management and teachers had decided together that they would implement the quotas wholeheartedly and “*EWS children will not be labeled*”. He added, “*It was important for everyone to agree because it is the attitude towards a policy that translates into actions.*”

Other practices described in the school helped us explain children and parent’s enthusiastic reports of the school. We were told that the teachers had been through a number of orientations and had been asked to talk to the parents in Hindi, reach out to them to help understand circulars and other required home support. One of the first challenges that the school faced was encouraging healthy eating while inculcating the culture of sitting together and having lunch. Since WS children could not be charged and often had problem in getting lunch, the school started providing meals to all children till 2nd standard and hopes to extend it to higher classes as well.

Acknowledging the academic challenges that teachers faced, the principal emphasized a point that had been neglected by most others, the point of entry being mandated by the RTE, “*At entry level all children are like blank slates. Some are bright, some are weak but that is the pattern in general children also. If the parent’s can’t give attention, we take the responsibility.*” Example of adaptations made include minimizing homework and even emphasizing ‘child centered’ homework instead of ‘parent dependent’ where the child and the parent have to get together.

The principal acknowledged that with the increasing proportion of non-fee paying children, “*schools will shift the burden, honestly or dishonestly to the remaining fee-paying parents.*” However, with financial support from the school’s foundation, the school had worked to minimize “optional” overhead charges for activities, by including them in the main fee.

To issues raised by several other principals against WS children (eg. stealing, usage of abusive language) and their parents (eg. complaining and demanding), the principal retorted, “*If schools say that WS parents don’t know how to talk, most of us also don’t know how to talk. Millionaire parents and children also misbehave. What do you attribute these thing to?*” Instead he argued, “*parents of EWS children feel so obliged and overwhelmed that they hardly complain.*”

Arguing that the school's culture depended heavily on the leadership's philosophy, he believed that, *"Others are reacting (negatively) only because of their mind set and trust me after five years, everyone will be speaking like me, positively. Is it a problem or opportunity? The schools have to decide for themselves."*

Discussion

Principals in private schools in India, face an extremely challenging environment today. The rapidity and scale of socio-economic changes sweeping India are well documented. Undoubtedly, these changes have significant implications not only for purchasing power but also for insecurities, aspirations and markers of social status. In a historically hierarchical society, with a fundamentally inegalitarian educational system, education becomes a marker of social status and schools an important venue of contestations emerging from these significant changes. It is clear that quotas under the RTE have, if not exacerbated, brought to the forefront many of these confrontations. There is lot more diversity in the voices of the 'elite' than much popular media and scholarly work acknowledges. And any attempt to summarize ignores this diversity. However, there are important under currents that emerge, which both characterize the Indian schooling system and have implications for potential impact of quotas and other instruments being discussed today.

Embedded in Markets

It would be easy to dismiss the oppositional views of principals as "hostility" of the elite but this hostility needs to be unpacked further. Any attempt to characterize the source of normative beliefs in principals does disservice to diversity of views and explanations we heard. However, our reading of the information we collected suggests that roots lie in deeply imbibed values of the market and role of principals as market players. Albeit to varying degrees, principals are quite aware and conscious of the "market value" of their schools and see people with differential abilities to pay differentially. This is evidenced in the objectives and constituencies they privilege normatively, the explanations they offer to justify their positions and their means of valuation of costs and benefits.

Many principals see benefits that may accrue to those availing WS quotas coming at the expense of those from their 'natural' constituency - the fee-paying parents. They are quite sensitive and even protective to the concerns of this section. Therefore, they oppose the quotas because it is perceived to be unfair to fee-paying children. The preferential position for fee-paying constituency may well stem from socio-economic background that they often share with principals. But it is justified on the ground that fee-paying constituency value the school offerings more (as expressed by their willingness to pay for it).

The differential status accorded to students by their ability to pay is most clearly evident in the discussions on 'extra-curricular' activities and how the privileges of advantaged are evaluated vis-à-vis the hurt it might cause the disadvantaged. While private schools constantly emphasize the need of these extra-curricular activities for overall development of their children, principals simultaneously seem to believe that these are "pleasure trips" and optional for WS children. The hurt that WS children may feel from being excluded is recognized but the activity or practices that lead to the exclusion are evaluated primarily on the extent to which they meet needs and demands of fee-paying parents. Therefore, the use of communication via e-mails, trips to multiplexes, holding lavish birthday parties are non-negotiable practices despite the fact that the divides they create are evident and known. The location of the problem, that principals (paternalistically) believe may damage the WS child, is thus transferred from the activity that creates the divide to the divide itself.

Further their role as gatekeepers to prized positions perhaps blinds principals to sacrifices and effort made by parents of WS children. The aspirations for quality schooling among the 'weaker'

sections has been well documented and our conversations with children and parents in Delhi only adds to the evidence. It is clear that many parents see these schools as bridges to overcome divides and WS quotas as an instrument to use them. Consequently they are willing to make necessary sacrifices and additional investments so that their children can avail the opportunities that these quotas provide. They do so with fairly limited ability to negotiate a system that they have little or no experience with, limited resources and safety nets. However, risks and investments that these parents make are ignored and instead assertions of their 'rights' to gain entry to the schools are perceived as devaluing them.

Evidence of resistance to the idea of a rights-based approach and deep embeddedness in the logic of markets also comes from the alternatives offered to quotas. Private schools would like to do it on their own terms, as charity and as some describe, 'Corporate Social Responsibility'.

Implications and Conclusion

No matter how faulty, existing structures cannot be simply wished away. They have to be understood. By interrogating them on several dimensions, quotas provide a window to understand values and beliefs of significant actors in the Indian education structure. To ignore the agency that actors like school principals have would not only condemn the quotas to immediate failure but also absolve them of all responsibilities.

The lack of faith in institutions to protect them in case of motivated allegations and the fear of a trial by media, makes the leadership feel more insecure in trying to work with a vulnerable population that they admittedly have little experience working with. Therefore, there is reason to be empathetic to their positions. However, the dominant discourse that seems to be developing around the issue of integration among private school principals is one which not only emphasizes differences between children based on economic backgrounds but also normative privileges keeping children from different economic backgrounds separate. The discourse supports or takes it as beyond the realm of their control, practices that differentiate students based on economic backgrounds. Accompanying this prioritization of economic resources is a fundamental dislike for a 'rights' based approach, especially one that tries to include private schools.

This may be the natural consequence of leading a 'private' organization but arguably should not be for institutions committed to 'charitable' purposes by law. Where this leads a society that is increasingly dependent on 'private' schooling should be of concern to those aspiring for a just and stable society. The complexities are exacerbated by a state that is engaged in significant social engineering, with little capacity to do so (Pritchett, 2009). For example, the government's perceived failure to include private schools, keep them informed and lack of a "proper plan of action" becomes a justifiable reason to resist the policy. Coupled with increasing perceptions and evidence of its failure to provide quality schooling, any legitimacy that the state has to direct the endeavor of education in Indian society is fast corroding. If education indeed has the task of promoting "a common widely-shared perspective of social values and society at large and a sense of equity" (Tilak, 2012), it is unclear where the initiative would come from. Our study suggests it is unrealistic to hope that private actors would perform this task on their own accord.

Our study also raises questions for proponents of other institutional arrangements for schooling to answer. For example, an unstated but implicit assumption underlying arguments in favour of a "voucher" system (see for example Shah, 2009) is that schools (and those that run it) are indifferent to the source of financial resources a child uses to access the school and therefore the child's experience in school is independent of whether the source of funds for her education is the public exchequer or her household. This would be a questionable assumption in any hierarchical, class-based society. But it is particularly questionable one in which educational outcomes continue to have had a very rigid relationship with social origins (for example on

caste and religion see Desai, Adams, & Dubey, 2010). With some principals even referring to the (self) fee-paying children and the households they come from as “*acche log*” (good people), there are clear underlying clashes in values and visions of education that need to be resolved, if schooling experiences have to become truly independent of socio-economic backgrounds.

While we have empathy for several arguments made by the principals, the one that we have least empathy for is the paternalistic view that children from weaker sections should be kept separate for their own good, to protect them from being emotionally scarred. It would be naive to believe that children don't encounter and learn to live with worse differences on a daily basis. Therefore to argue that disadvantaged children be kept in separate schools is an argument that can only be constructed on the grounds of protecting privileges that hitherto have remained unchallenged.

Although limited, we do find some evidence that some educators perhaps are seeing quotas as an opportunity to enact their roles as social change makers. Therefore, by questioning the rationality of systems they inhabit, quotas potentially open up a space for educators to act on values and commitments that they otherwise would not have been able to. Further, quotas potentially create an instrument to organize democratic action around, as a few civil society organizations like Social Jurist and Institute of Social Studies Trust have done. As Apple (2011: 27) points out, “struggles over schooling - over what should be taught, over the relationship between schools and local communities, over the very ends and means of the institution itself - have provided a crucible for the formation of larger social movements toward equality.” The danger, of course, is that grossly inadequate policy responses such as the quotas, which at best can cater to the needs of a few, can also serve to create divisions and diffuse any mobilization around the much larger necessity of a high quality public education serving needs of a democratic society.

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