

PUBLIC  
REPORT  
ON  
BASIC  
EDUCATION  
IN INDIA

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The PROBE Team

*in association with  
Centre for Development Economics*

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# foreword

I consider it a privilege to introduce this study to a discerning public. It is at once a reiteration of things known, things remembered and a campaign to change them in the ways we would like to remember them in the future. The authors' collective has covered the populous states of north India in the quest for a diagnosis and a cure of the educational condition.

The core of the report is the right of all children to elementary education. The assertion on their behalf is unequivocal. The arguments in support are meticulously built in the introductory chapter. It is clear that universal elementary education is first and foremost a constitutional directive. It is also a matter of popular demand. People see that education provides the base for a person's own well-being in the future, and also that of the immediate community and the larger society. The role of universal education in a democracy – that of providing an educated electorate – seems indisputable. The strongest rationale is that the education of all children is an imperative. This concern for social justice informs the entire fabric of the report.

This report varies in a distinct way from those of the high-powered Education Commissions. It is not a public report made to the government, but a people's report made to Indian citizens. We hear the voices broadcast without distortion or static.

The study is exemplary in more ways than one; armed with an authentic intent, the right set of questions and a sensitive ear, a team of researchers have collated a report on primary education in the northern states. There is passion in their venture: a passion for equity and social justice. But the presentation of facts is dispassionate, objective, cool. Facts are stated with minimal comment. Explanation and analysis are based on observations and what people say. The quotes from the responses of teachers, parents and children provide variety, texture and tone. As one reads, one travels with the researcher to Banaskantha, Palamau, Mathura and Kullu, smells the decaying school rooms, hears the boys and girls screaming out in chorus, inhales the dust of the durries in the classroom, sees the hope in the eyes of the children as they clutch their slates.

This book is recommended to all people who feel concern about the dismal scenario of India's school systems and are looking for a way out of the impasse. If we, as a people, fail to recognize the importance of actually enabling the children of India to have formal education for eight years at least, we would have betrayed the trust that our children repose in us and the hope that they have for their future.





# whodunnit

The final version of this report has been prepared by the PROBE team: Anuradha De, Jean Drèze, Shiva Kumar, Claire Noronha, Pushpendra, Anita Rampal, Meera Samson and Amarjeet Sinha. At earlier stages, the team worked in close collaboration with Kiran Bhatta, Haris Gazdar, Geeta Gandhi Kingdon, Anomita Goswami, Aprajit Mahajan and Nidhi Mehrotra. While some of us have institutional affiliations, we have all worked on this report in our individual capacity.

The report also draws on contributions from Jayakumar Anagol, Niharika Banerjea, Rukmini Banerji, Amita Baviskar, Bela Bhatia, Zarina Bhatta, Daisy Bihari, Marie-Eve Bondroit, Neera Burra, Anindita Chakrabarti, Swati Chakravarty, D.P. Chaudhri, Arun Ghosh, Sangeeta Goyal, Snehlata Gupta, Keerti Jayaram, Abhas Kumar Jha, Venita Kaul, Binod Khadria, Reetika Khera, Veena Kulkarni, Krishna Kumar, Aditi Mehta, Mohd. Muzammil, Geetha Nambissan, Anjali Noronha, Gail Omvedt, Rohini Pande, Seeta Prabhu, Vinod Raina, Janaki Rajan, V.K. Ramachandran, Nitya Rao, Nitya S., Anil Sadgopal, Manju Senapaty, Chandra Kant Shourie, Alaka Singh, Shantha Sinha, Vandana Sipahimalani, Snigdha Srivastava, Mohammad Talib, J.B.G. Tilak, Jeemol Unni and N.V. Varghese. Aside from these contributions, we have received helpful advice, comments and suggestions from many good people — too many to list them all. We have also learnt a great deal from various members of Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti, Eklavya, Lok Jumbish, MV Foundation, Pratham, Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission, Rajya Gyan Vigyan Kendra, Seva Mandir, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, the Lokshala team and the Department of Education. The list is not exhaustive, and we apologize to those who fell through the net.

The successful completion of the PROBE survey owes much to the field investigators. We are especially indebted to Alka Bhardwaj, Rajeev Ranjan Jha, Sanjeev Kumar, Rajendra Mehta and Afshan Zafar for outstanding work. The field investigators also contributed to the research through their participation in follow-up workshops. Members of the PROBE team participated in the field work and follow-up workshops, and revisited selected villages after the main survey.

We gratefully acknowledge the Centre for Development Economics, the Indian Social Institute and the Institute for Human Development for institutional support; the Centre for Sustainable Development (Mussoorie), the Giri Institute of Development Studies (Lucknow), the A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies (Patna) and the Institute of Development Studies (Jaipur) for hosting workshops; the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (New Delhi) for access to newspaper clippings; and the Canadian International Development Agency and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Canada) for funding the field survey and the research.

Above all, we are grateful to the thousands of parents, teachers and children who have cooperated with the field survey. More than anything else, this report is an attempt to give expression to their testimonies.



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# 1

## CHAPTER ONE

# elementary education as a fundamental right



### 1.1. Introduction

**A**s this report comes to completion, elementary education is close to being recognized as a fundamental right of all Indian citizens. This is the aim of the proposed 83rd constitutional amendment, which was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in July 1997.

**T**he fact that this proposal has been gathering dust for so long speaks volumes about the concern of political leaders for elementary education. Nevertheless, there is a good chance that

the 83rd amendment will be adopted in the near future.

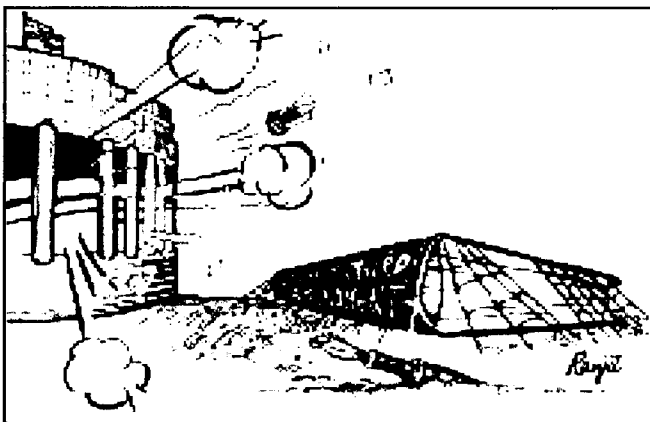
**T**his amendment, however, is only the beginning — not the end — of the struggle to universalize elementary education. Legislation alone cannot make up for half a century of neglect. As this report brings out, the schooling system is nowhere near ready to provide education of decent quality to every child. If the right to elementary education is to become a reality, a massive effort is required to bring the schooling system in line with this goal. And as things stand, there is little sign of such an effort being undertaken. Quite

the contrary: as discussed in the concluding chapter of this report, the rhetoric of education as a fundamental right is going hand in hand with an unprecedented retreat of state commitment to universal elementary education.

This state of affairs is not just an indictment of the government. Of course, the government has a special responsibility for translating the right to education into reality. But opposition parties and social movements also bear responsibility for failing to challenge the government's apathy, and to give forceful expression to popular aspirations for education. Further, the successful universalization of elementary education also depends on the positive involvement of teachers, parents and other members of the society. Whenever a teacher absconds from the classroom, or a parent withdraws a child from school on flimsy grounds, or an employer exploits a child labourer, the fundamental right to education stands violated. Upholding this right is, ultimately, a social responsibility — no one is exempted.

In this report, we try to present a balanced assessment of the state of India's schooling system. We also discuss how the current morass has come about, and try to give an idea of what is to be done (without indulging in detailed prescription).

This is not an exhaustive enquiry — it goes only as far as we have been able to go with the time and resources available. However, even this relatively brief survey unearths plenty of problems, and many possibilities for change. We hope that it



will stimulate further enquiry, debate and action.

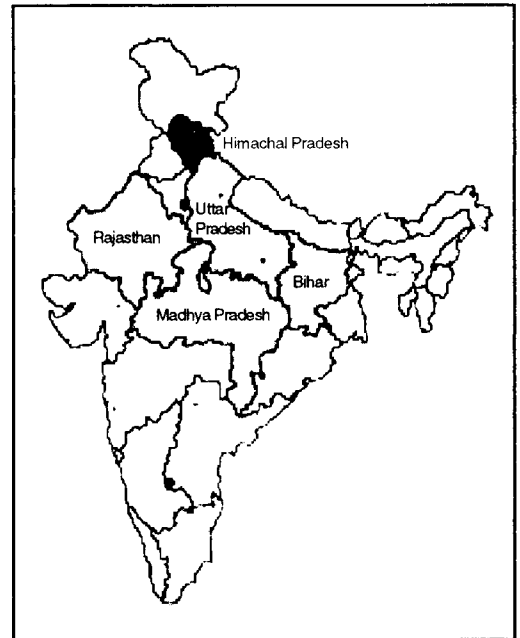
## 1.2. Why PROBE?

Perhaps you, the reader, are already yawning and wondering why on earth we need another report on education. This is a fair question. If all the education reports that have been written since 1947 were to be gathered in one anthology, the *Mahabharata* would look quite concise in comparison. How is this Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) different?

The main answer is that this report builds on extensive field work in rural areas. Based on this field work, we have attempted to present an authentic picture of the schooling system as parents, children and teachers experience it. In that sense, this is not just a public report but also a 'people's report'. It is written from the standpoint of the underprivileged, especially the millions of children who are excluded from the schooling system, and their parents. The report is based on the premise that elementary education is a fundamental right of every child. Guaranteeing this right is not just a matter of welfare or development, but one of basic social justice.

## 1.3. The PROBE survey

The cornerstone of this report is a detailed field survey (hereafter the PROBE survey) carried out from September to December 1996. This survey covered all schooling facilities, and a sample of 1376 households, in 234 randomly-selected villages of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. A sketch of the survey appears at the end of this chapter. Further details are given in the Appendix, where you will



also find chapter-wise explanatory notes pertaining to the survey data.

The five states covered by the survey account for 40 per cent of India's population, and more than half of all out-of-school children. This is not to say that they are 'representative' of the country as a whole. In fact, except for Himachal Pradesh, these states are the worst-performing in terms of elementary education. The survey findings presented in the report have to be read in that light. These findings, however, have much relevance for India as a whole, in so far as the problems identified in the selected states often exist elsewhere to various degrees. In order to give the report an all-India focus, we have also drawn on other field-based studies. A selection of these studies is listed in the Bibliographical Note, along with other sources.

One of the striking findings emerging from the PROBE survey is the contrast between Himachal Pradesh and the other four states. In comparison with the other states, Himachal Pradesh has made remarkable progress towards universal elementary education. Chapter 9 focuses on this little-known 'success story'. To avoid mixing apples and oranges, the survey data presented in other chapters *exclude* Himachal Pradesh, and should be understood to apply to the other four states (hereafter the 'PROBE states'):

Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

The term 'elementary education' usually refers to the first eight years of schooling. In most states, including the PROBE states, these are divided into two stages: 'primary' (classes 1 to 5) and 'upper primary' (classes 6 to 8). To keep things manageable, we chose *primary* schooling as the main focus of the PROBE survey. Unless stated otherwise, the survey data presented in this report pertain to the primary stage. However, our concern in this report is with elementary education as a whole.

All the stories and anecdotes appearing in this report are real. Most of them are based on the PROBE survey, which includes a great deal of qualitative information and first-hand observations. We have retained the original village names, but names of individuals have

sometimes been replaced by pseudonyms, for the sake of privacy. Once in a while, we have also made use of a pilot survey carried out in Delhi in 1995.

## 1.4. The case for universal elementary education

Is it important to universalize elementary education? In a sense, this question was settled many years ago, and does not require further discussion. Indeed, Article 45 of the Directive Principles of the Constitution urges all states to provide 'free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years' — and that too by 1960! The current proposal to recognize elementary education as a fundamental right is just a stronger version of this earlier directive.

*'The State shall endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.'*

*(Constitution of India, Directive Principles of State Policy, Article 45.)*

Yet, the notion that it is not essential for all citizens to be educated remains widespread. And this is one reason why public commitment to universal elementary education is so half-hearted. Even among teachers, we found persons who considered education as unimportant for children of the 'lower classes' (see p.51). A common variant of this view is that, as things stand, schooling is 'irrelevant' for some children because the curriculum and teaching methods are

### ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: RIGHT OR PRIVILEGE?

The notion that elementary education is a fundamental right is not accepted by all, at least not wholeheartedly. Some even perceive the universalization of education as a threat to the opportunities of their own children. In their view, the role of the schooling system is to act as a 'filtering process', which picks the best and the brightest and helps them to realize their potential. If too many children get on board, the prospects of those who currently enjoy the privilege of good schooling facilities will be threatened.

Of course, these feelings are seldom expressed openly. Instead, the tendency is to rationalize the inequities of the schooling system in various ways. One common device is to blame the victims. Poor parents, for instance, are held responsible for not sending their children to school, overlooking all the difficulties they face. Below are other real-life examples of statements of this kind, heard in middle-class circles in the course of our research:

'So many schools, how can you talk of a shortage of schools?'  
'Lack of enterprise — so lazy, they do not make the best of the opportunities offered.'

'Why should government take the responsibility for educating children?'

'We have worked. We pay taxes. We should get something in return.'

'If a man can pay for his *beedis*, if a man can buy *daru*, then in my opinion he should be able to pay for his child's education.'

'Waste of resources. They need literacy, that's it, just enough to catch a bus.'

'The government has reduced funding for higher education to promote primary education — yet it is a fact that many of these people cannot learn.'

The perception of schooling as a filtering process has a strong influence on educational planning. It helps to explain, for instance, why enormous resources have been spent on developing world-class institutions of higher learning (such as the IIMs and IITs) while thousands of primary schools went without blackboard or drinking water. Teaching methods and the school curriculum also bear the stamp of this view of education as a rat-race. We will return to that in chapter 6, when we peep 'inside the classroom'.

inappropriate. Interestingly, we found little trace of these rejectionist views among ordinary parents. It is usually in elite circles that concern to obtain the best possible education for one's own children somehow goes hand in hand with nagging doubts about the value of education for others.

Even those who are in favour of universal elementary education are not always fully aware of how important this social goal really is. For instance, government planners and business groups often stress that education is important for economic growth. That is true enough, but the importance of elementary education goes much beyond this concern for 'human capital'. Given the influence of these reductionist views, it may be useful to state a fuller version of the case for universal elementary education. At least eight arguments can be invoked:

**1. Fundamental right :** As we saw, universal elementary education is a constitutional directive. Further, other constitutional rights (such as the right to personal liberty) may be considered to encompass the right to education. This point, in fact, was made in February 1993 by the Supreme Court. An explicit recognition of the fundamental right to elementary education is embodied in the proposed 83rd constitutional amendment. The constitutional argument alone clinches the case for considering universal elementary education as an essential social goal.

**2. Popular demand :** Contrary to the common notion that poor parents are not interested in education, the PROBE survey indicates a massive popular demand for schooling (see chapter 2). The demand is not quite universal, but it is widespread and rapidly growing. Failure to support universal elementary education is a form of contempt for popular aspirations.

**3. Human capital :** The argument that education is important for economic success receives strong support from recent research. This point has not been lost on poor parents, who often have few other prospects for economic advancement than the education of their children. The

education of boys, in particular, is driven first and foremost by the hope of better jobs and higher incomes. Some observers deplore this 'materialistic' view of education, but there is no reason to dismiss the concern of poor parents for greater economic security. The case for a broader view of the value of education does not entail a denial of the economic benefits.

#### **4. Joy of learning :**

Children who are taught in a supportive environment enjoy the schooling experience: the friends, the play, and the study. In the PROBE survey, we found that when children were asked why they wanted to continue studying, their answer usually referred less to future benefits than to the immediate pleasure of learning — '*bas, padhna accha lagta hai*'. The yearning for this joy comes across most clearly in those who are deprived of it. For instance, young daughters condemned to domestic drudgery after being withdrawn from school, often look back wistfully to their school days. Having said this, it is also true that the school environment often fails to foster the joy of learning, and even alienates many children. Thus, the right to education has to be understood as a right to education of a certain *quality*. Who would aspire to the right to get crushed, bored, humiliated or punished day after day?

**5. Individual well-being :** The link between education and individual well-being goes much beyond economic returns or the joy of learning. For instance, there is plenty of evidence that education greatly helps to achieve good health, and to protect children from disease. This is why infant mortality in Kerala, India's most literate state, is only 14 per thousand live births, compared with, say, 97 per thousand in



DAVANITA SINGH

Madhya Pradesh. Another reason why education enhances individual well-being is that illiterate people tend to have low self-esteem and a low social status. The same applies to out-of-school children, many of whom endure further deprivations such as the physical and psychological stress of child labour. Generally, education facilitates a whole range of activities that people tend to value: reading newspapers, finding one's way in a new city, taking a bank loan, avoiding extortion or harassment, and participating in local politics, among many other examples.

**6. Social progress :** Education is of value not only for the person who acquires it, but also for others. For instance, when a young person from a deprived community acquires good education, his or her abilities often help the whole community. Similarly, an educated mother is more likely to send her own children to school, so that the benefits of education are compounded across generations. Widespread education also helps to resolve

social problems that call for open debate and public action. Dealing with issues such as communicable diseases, population growth or environmental degradation in an effective and democratic manner depends on a wide exchange of information and views among the public.

**7. Political participation :** Real democracy is a mirage as long as a large part of the population remains excluded from the political process. Common causes of exclusion are economic insecurity, lack of organization, and also widespread illiteracy. While some kinds of political action require little education, in general literacy and education are important tools of effective political participation, whether it takes the form of informed voting, or signing a petition, or organizing a protest, or just contributing to public debates. To illustrate, consider the ongoing debate on economic reforms. While this debate concerns all citizens, it actually involves only a tiny fraction of the population. As recent surveys have shown, the vast majority of Indians do not even know that economic reforms are taking place. People can hardly be expected to have a view on this matter, let alone take active steps to oppose or support the reforms, if they have little awareness of what is going on. Much the same can be said of recent debates about, say, the uniform civil code, seed patents or nuclear weapons.

**8. Social justice :** Last but not least, universal elementary education is a requirement of social justice. India has a long history of educational disparities being used to consolidate social inequalities based on class, caste and gender. To some extent, this pattern continues to apply today: privileged social groups have much better educational opportunities, and this further consolidates their privileges. Further, the link between educational disparities and social inequality is gaining strength day by day, as literacy and education become more important tools of self-defence. The powerlessness associated with being illiterate in modern society comes through loud and clear in the PROBE survey. As Shankar Lal of village Gadaula (Banda district, Uttar Pradesh) put it to us, '*Anpadh*

*admi jivanbhar kasht mein rahta hai* (an illiterate person's life is full of troubles)'.

It is worth noting that most of these arguments apply with special force to *female education*. For instance, one crucial link between widespread education and social justice relates to gender equity. In so far as endemic illiteracy among Indian women enhances their powerlessness in the family and the society, better schooling opportunities for girls are an essential step towards gender equality. The other arguments also point to the need for a special emphasis on female education. This emphasis is to some extent inherent in a programme of universal elementary education, given that a large majority of out-of-school children are girls. For the same reason, the reader will not find a separate chapter on 'female education' in this report — the issue runs through the whole study.

At this point, the reader may feel that education is a panacea for all individual and social ills. That, of course, is not the case. Universal elementary education, on its own, is no substitute for other fundamental rights such as the right to freedom from discrimination or exploitation. There is no need, however, to pitch one fundamental right against another. When it comes to elementary education, what is far more important is to acknowledge the *complementarity* between this particular right and a broad range of other individual rights and social goals.

## 1.5. A counter-argument

We should now deal with an argument that has been quite influential in spreading scepticism about the importance of universal elementary education, not so much in official quarters as in 'radical' circles. The argument is that universalizing elementary education is pointless as long as the school pedagogy does not have a more liberating character. A stronger version of this view is that schooling is a form of social control, aimed at depriving

children of their creative abilities and independence of mind.

This argument merits serious consideration, notwithstanding the fact that its proponents rarely fail to send their own children to school. It is certainly true that teaching methods in most schools are extremely stultifying, and that schooling is all but geared to personal development and critical enquiry. This limitation, however, applies *throughout* the schooling system: even in privileged urban schools, children are submitted to all kinds of mind-numbing exercises, from learning without comprehension to wholesale memorizing and physical punishment. The pedagogical critique, therefore, is not a case for tolerating the exclusion of underprivileged children from the schooling system. It is, strictly speaking, a case for pedagogical improvement throughout the schooling system, or for withdrawing *all* children from it.

This critique is also partly based on a misunderstanding of how the liberating influence of education operates. Progressive pedagogy can certainly strengthen this influence, but it is not its only source. For instance, learning to read and write can do a great deal to liberate children from the tremendous sense of powerlessness experienced by illiterate persons in modern society, even when these skills are acquired through fairly routine methods. Similarly, children often benefit from associating with other children in a learning environment, even when the content of the learning activities themselves is of limited interest. Some educationists, in fact, take the view that this socialization experience has much greater educational value than the formal curriculum.

In short, it is right to call for profound changes in teaching methods and the orientation of schooling, and also to integrate this concern with the universalization of elementary education (more on this in chapter 6). But this does not mean that universalization should *wait* for sweeping changes in school pedagogy. Such a position may sound radical, but it is really a recipe for inaction.



## 1.6. Literacy, schooling and education

In a letter to the International League for the Rational Education of Children, dated 14 August 1908, Rabindranath Tagore spoke eloquently about the meaning of education. In a nutshell, he argued for viewing education as 'a right which enables individuals and communities to act on reflection'. Many other definitions are possible, and compatible with this report. One reason for highlighting this one is that, in spirit with this report, it draws attention to (a) education as a fundamental right, (b) the social dimension of education, (c) the importance of critical enquiry, and (d) the link between education and action.

Schooling is not the only means of acquiring education, but the two are closely linked. In particular, the right to education is usually understood in terms of a certain number of years of schooling (e.g. eight years according to the standard understanding of Article 45). We shall follow this convention, but the reader should not lose sight of the fact that education is more than schooling, and also that a lot of schooling activity has little to do with education as Tagore defines it. Tagore's stress on 'reflection', for instance, is absent from the standard school curriculum. Instead, the stress tends to be on acquiring specific mental skills that happen to be valued in the modern economy and society.

One of these skills is literacy. In economic research, the terms 'education' and 'literacy' have tended to be used somewhat interchangeably, partly because literacy rates are convenient statistical indicators of educational levels. Literacy is indeed an educational achievement of immense importance, and, as will be seen in the next chapter, there is much to learn from comparisons of literacy rates in different regions or periods. But this does not justify confusing literacy and education, or restricting the focus of education policy to

'total literacy'. Education for all is a much broader — as well as more demanding — social goal.

## 1.7. Outline of the report

In this chapter, we have tried to build the conceptual scaffolding of the PROBE report. With this background, we now enter the real world of schooling. We begin, in the next chapter, with a brief overview of 'facts and myths' about the educational situation in India. If you are already knowledgeable on this subject, the 'facts' will sound familiar, but the 'myths' may still interest you.

In chapter 3, we take leave from secondary data and try to put ourselves in the *chappals* of ordinary parents and children. Based on the PROBE survey, we attempt to convey their perceptions of the schooling system, and the problems they face in acquiring education. One reason why their struggle is so unrewarding is the low quality of schooling, and this leads us, in chapter 4, to take a critical look at the school environment. We focus in particular on four distinct areas of concern: the physical infrastructure, teacher resources, classroom activity patterns, and social discrimination at school.

Chapter 5 lends its ear to the teachers — the key actors in the village school. After a brief discussion of their background and outlook, we identify two major reasons why their skills are vastly under-utilized: a demotivating work environment, and lack of accountability. Following on this, we turn to relations between teachers and the village community, and the role of teacher-parent cooperation in creating a more supportive and accountable school environment. In chapter 6, we follow teachers and pupils inside the classroom. The main focus of this chapter is on basic pedagogical issues. We discuss, in particular, how children are burdened with an overloaded curriculum, unfriendly

textbooks, oppressive teaching methods, and exacting examinations.

In chapter 7, we take a step back and consider some general issues of education management. Since the PROBE survey did not cover the higher layers of the school management structure, the discussion here is far from exhaustive. Instead, we present a few 'case studies' of management issues as seen from the grass-roots. The topics selected include Operation Blackboard, pupil-incentive schemes, the inspection system, and school records. In the same spirit, chapter 8 examines some recent developments in the field of elementary education. These include school-meal programmes, 'alternative schooling', the rapid expansion of private schools, various NGO initiatives, and some examples of spontaneous popular action.

The silver lining of this report is tucked away in chapter 9, where we take a holiday from the PROBE states to watch the schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh. The term 'revolution' is a trifle romantic, but it is hard to find a better term to describe Himachal Pradesh's accelerated transition towards universal elementary education. Chapter 9 attempts to present a fair picture of this transition. It also discusses the foundations of this success, focusing especially on the virtuous circle of state initiative and public response, as well as on the social conditions that have strengthened this process in Himachal Pradesh.

Finally, chapter 10 returns to the bigger issues in the light of the report's findings. It is especially concerned with the politics of elementary education. We argue that the schooling transition achieved in Himachal Pradesh *can* be realized on a broader basis, but also that there are disquieting signs of official abdication on this front. There is, thus, an urgent need to build the political momentum required to make the fundamental right to education a reality. This is a real challenge for all those who stand in solidarity with the underprivileged sections of Indian society.

## THE PROBE SURVEY

	PROBE States (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh)		Himachal Pradesh	
	female*	male	female	male
Number of sample villages:	188		48	
Number of sample households:	1,221		154	
Number of children aged 6-14 in the sample households:				
enrolled in a school	766	1,331	157	159
not enrolled	596	227	9	4
<b>total</b>	<b>1,362</b>	<b>1,558</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>163</b>
Number of sample schools:				
primary	162	25	45	4
middle with primary section	32	12	1	2
secondary with primary section	1	4	2	0
<b>total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>6</b>
Number of teachers in primary sections:				
government schools	137	513	68	99
private schools	24	162	22	3
<b>total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>102</b>

\* Adjusted for under-counting of girls (see Survey Methodology, p. 143).

### CLARIFICATIONS

This page displays the skeleton of the PROBE survey. Some clarifications follow. If you don't like statistics, you can skip this page without fear of being lost later on. If you like them, you can find further fodder in the Appendix.

1. The main focus of the PROBE survey is *primary schooling*. Accordingly, we collected detailed information on all schools with a primary section (i.e. classes 1-5) in the sample villages — hereafter the 'sample schools'. The term 'primary schools' refers to schools with a primary section *only*. Most sample schools are primary schools. The term 'primary sections' refers to all primary sections in the sample schools.

2. While sample schools include both government and private schools, the main focus of the report is on *government schools*. These make up four-fifths of all sample schools. *Private schools* are dealt with in chapter 8 (section 8.4). Unless stated otherwise, the school data presented elsewhere

in the report should be understood to apply to government schools only.

3. *Sample households* consist of a random sample of households residing in the sample villages and with at least one child in the 6-12 age group.

4. As the above figures show, about 70 per cent of all children aged 6-14 in the sample households are currently enrolled in a school. This is an encouraging trend, considering that out-of-school children made up about three-fifths of the 5-14 age group in the PROBE states as recently as 1986-7 (Visaria et al., 1993). However, this trend has to be read in light of the fact that (1) 'nominal enrolment' is a common and possibly growing practice (see chapter 8 and Survey Methodology), and (2) even among genuinely-enrolled children, attendance rates are often low.

# 2

## CHAPTER TWO

# elementary education in india: some facts and myths



ANAL SHAH

**T**his chapter is divided into two parts. Section 2.1 presents a brief picture of the educational situation in India. This situation is looked at from various angles: the progress made since independence, India's position *vis-à-vis* other countries, the comparative achievements of different social groups, and so on. No matter how one looks at it, the state of elementary education in India is dismal. Section 2.2 discusses four common myths about the roots of this problem. In later chapters,

we will re-examine the causes of educational deprivation, based on the PROBE survey.

### ■ 2.1. Some Facts

#### ■ Fact 1: Low achievements

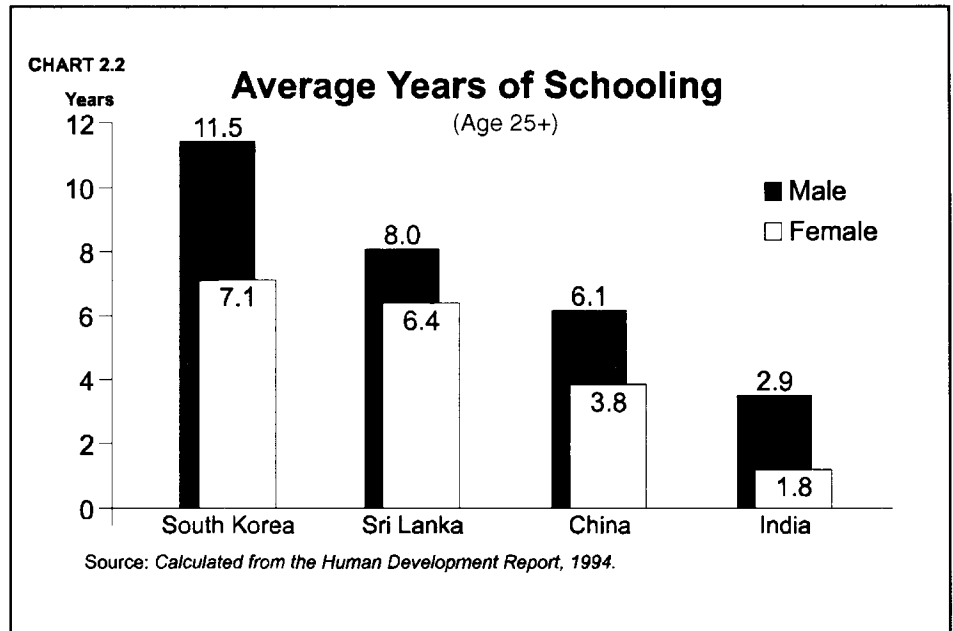
**T**he fact that elementary education in India remains far from universal is no

secret. Yet, the enormity of the problem is often underestimated. In some circles, India's success with *higher* education (which has produced a galaxy of eminent scientists, lawyers, doctors and writers) has even created the impression that we are doing just fine.

Contrary to this illusion of success, hundreds of millions of Indians continue to be deprived of the opportunity to learn. For instance, at the time of the 1991 census and the National Family Health Survey (1992-3):

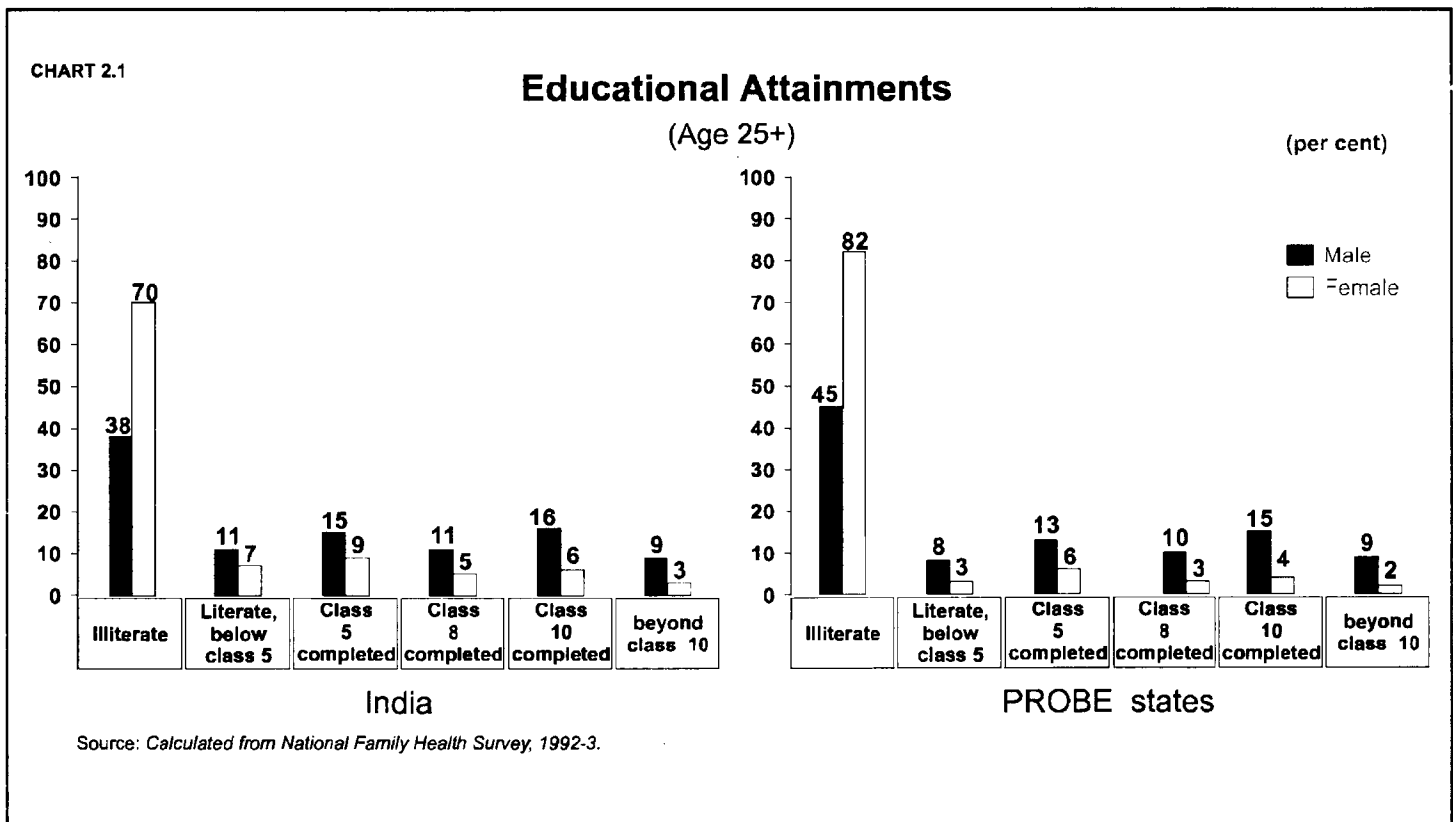
- Half of the country's population (61 per cent of women and 36 per cent of men, aged 7 and above) was unable to read and write.
- Less than 30 per cent of all adults had completed eight years of schooling.
- One-third of all children aged 6-14 years (about 23 million boys and 36 million girls) were out of school.

International comparisons give another useful view of this bleak picture. In India, the average adult has spent a little over



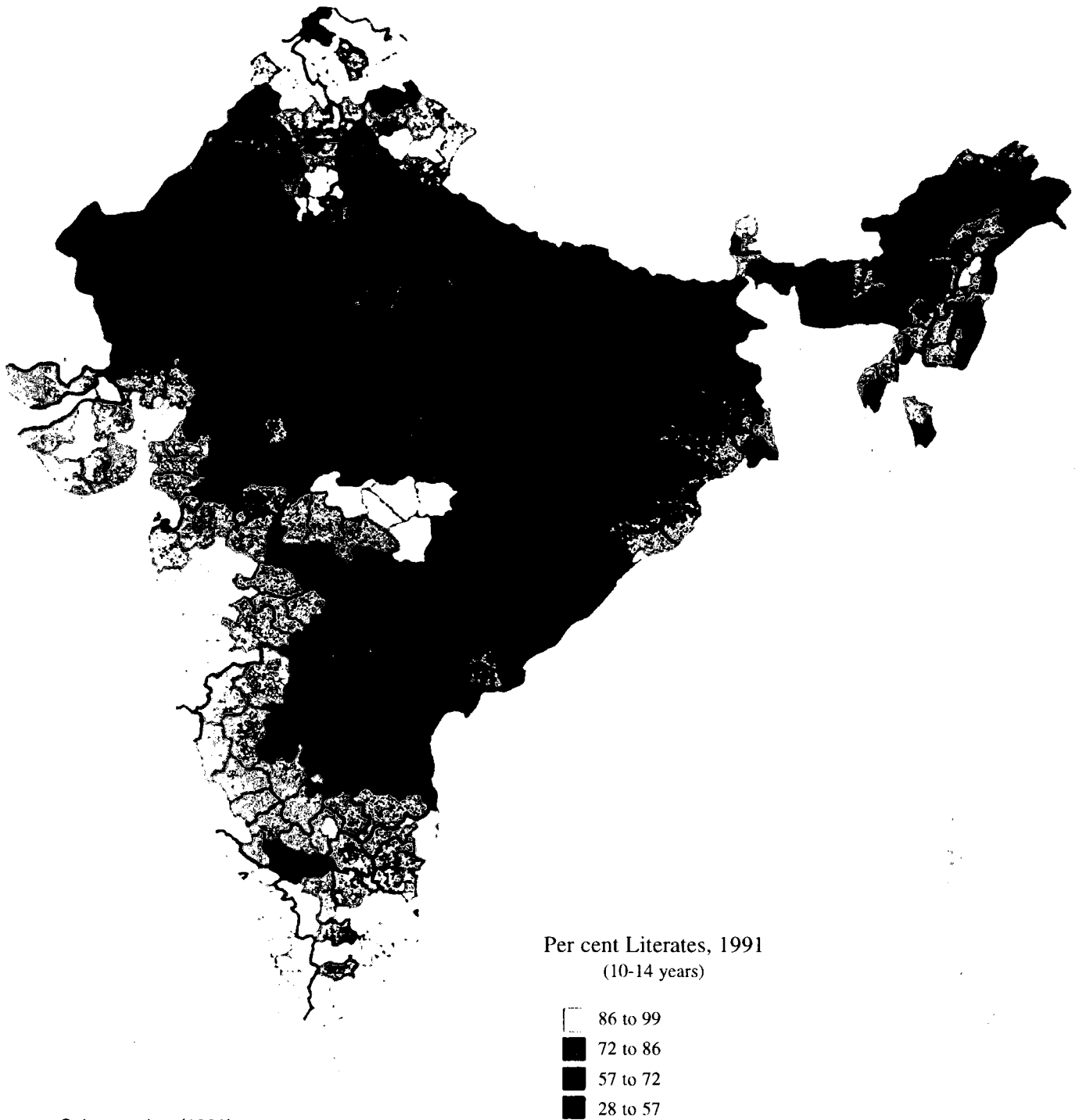
two years at school, compared with five years in China, seven years in Sri Lanka and over nine years in South Korea. India appears in a poor light even compared with regions that are often considered here as 'backward': for instance, female literacy rates are much lower in India than in sub-Saharan Africa.

*Only a small minority of the population has attained the constitutional goal of eight years of schooling.*



# DISTRICT-WISE LITERACY RATES: AGE 10-14

Data not available



Source : Subramanian (1998).

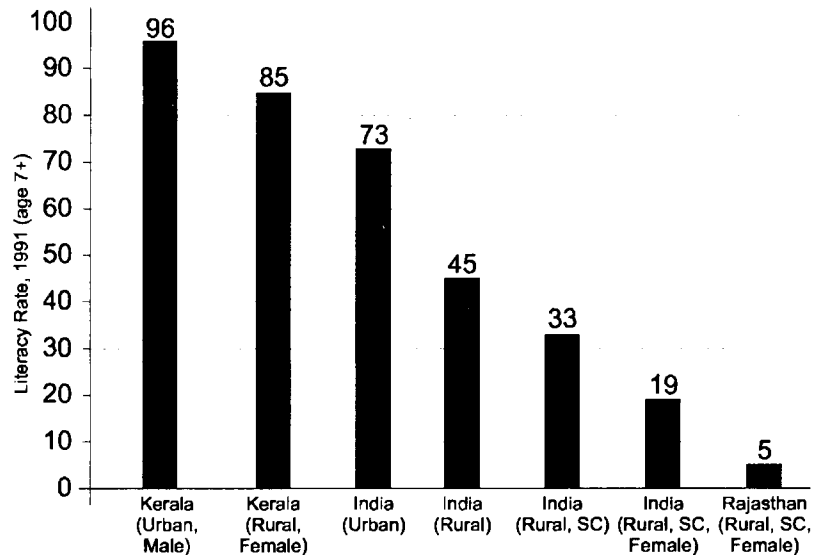
## ■ Fact 2: High disparities

Aside from being low on average, educational achievements in India are highly *uneven*. Literacy, for instance, is almost universal in urban Kerala, but practically unknown among scheduled caste women in Rajasthan (Chart 2.3).

Generally, literacy rates vary a great deal by region, class, caste and gender. The regional contrasts are illustrated in the map alongside. As this map shows, literacy rates tend to be higher in south and western India than in north or eastern India. The most advanced state is Kerala, where illiteracy has been virtually eliminated. The PROBE states (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) are the worst performers. It is shocking to find, for instance, that in as many as 72 districts of these four states a *majority* of children in the 10-14 age group are illiterate.

CHART 2.3

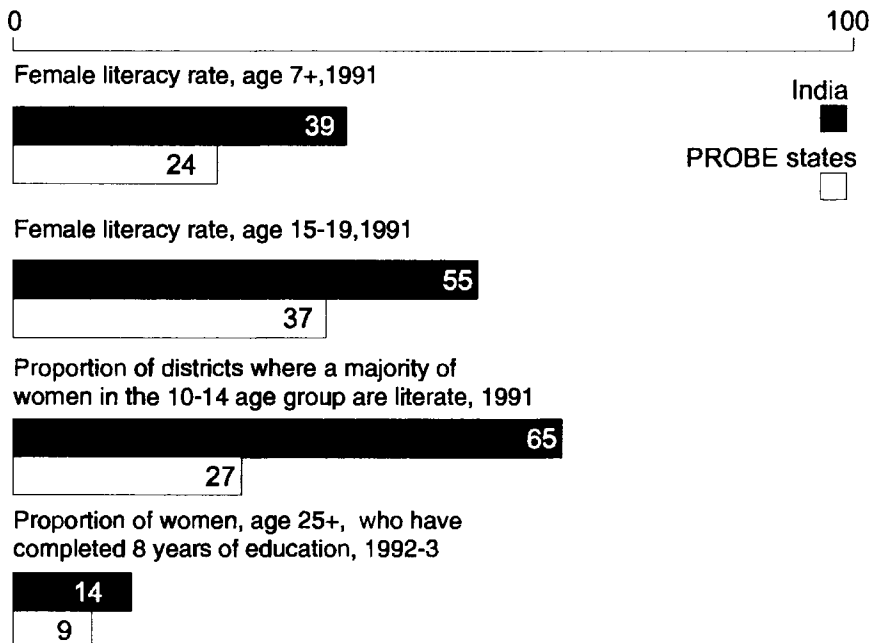
### Literacy Rates: Social and Regional Disparities



Source: Census of India, 1991, Social and Cultural Tables, Part IV B, Table C-02.

CHART 2.4

### Female Education: Consequences of Neglect



Source: Census of India, 1991; Social and Cultural Tables, Part IVB, Table C-02; National Family Health Survey, 1992-3, Table 3.6.

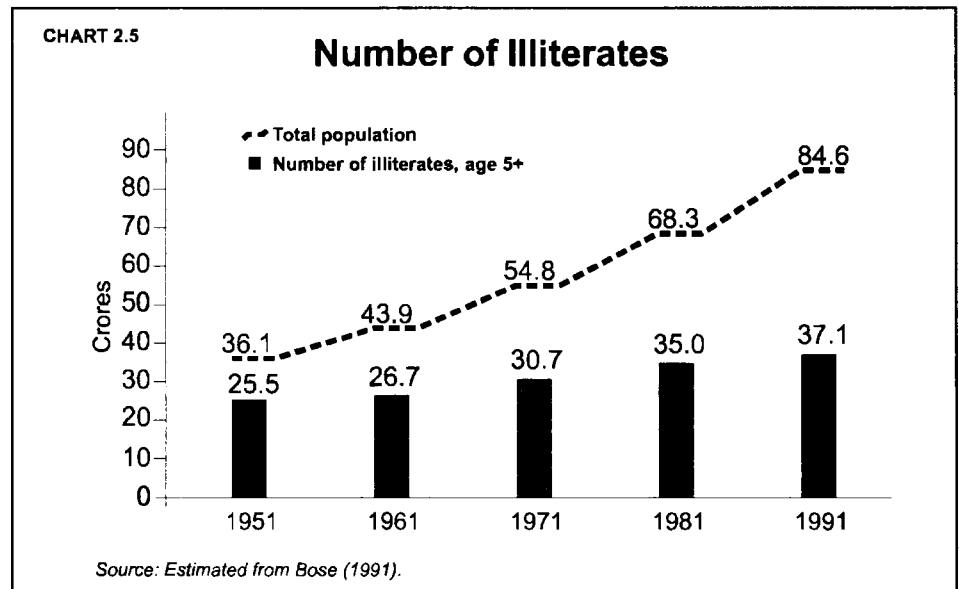
Within a given region, literacy rates are usually lower among those who are economically underprivileged. Literacy rates also tend to be relatively low among scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and Muslims. Even at a given level of income, children from these disadvantaged communities are much less likely to go to school than other children.

Another crucial pattern is that literacy rates are much lower for women than for men in most regions. In fact, India has one of the highest female-male gaps in literacy rates in the world. According to *Human Development Report 1998*, only five countries have a higher gap than India: Bhutan, Syria, Togo, Malawi and Mozambique. Rajasthan alone has as large a population as all these countries combined, and *no* country in the world has a higher female-male literacy gap than Rajasthan. The other PROBE states only fare marginally better than Rajasthan.

### ■ Fact 3: Slow progress

Some readers may be hoping to take comfort in the fact that the state of elementary education in India is rapidly *improving*. The situation is indeed improving over time (as in most other countries). The pace of improvement, however, is slow. For instance, the increase of literacy *rates* is so slow that the *absolute* number of illiterate persons is still rising year after year: the number of illiterate persons aged 5 and above rose from 350 million in 1981 to 371 million in 1991 (Chart 2.5).

During the last fifty years, many countries have overtaken India in the field of elementary education. An important example is China. In the late nineteen-forties, both countries had very similar problems of mass illiteracy and endemic poverty. Today, India is way behind China as far as elementary education is concerned (Chart 2.6). The proportion of illiterate persons in the 15-19 age group, for instance, is more than six times as high in India (34 per cent) as in China (5 per cent). If present trends continue, it may take another fifty years before India achieves



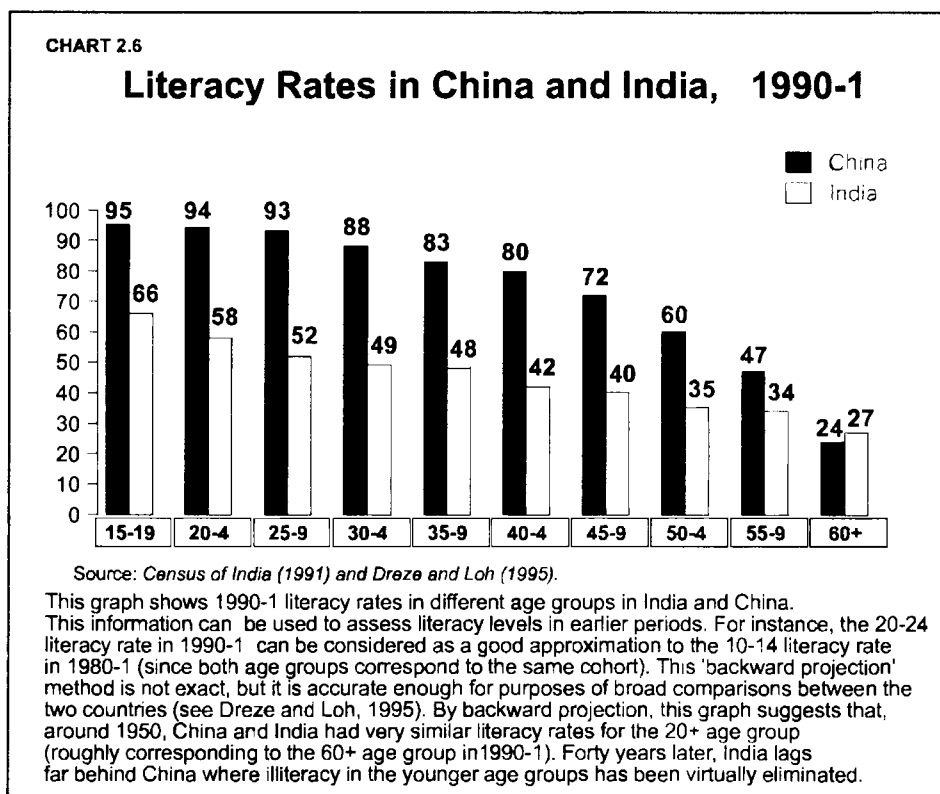
the constitutional goal of universal education until the age of fourteen.

### ■ Fact 4: State inertia

India's dismal performance in the field of elementary education is largely a reflection of state inertia. This takes the form, for instance, of under-provision of education facilities, inadequate supervision of the

schooling system, and blatant neglect of disadvantaged regions and communities. Many other examples will come up later in this report. In recent years, attempts of varying significance have been made to resolve the inadequacies of the schooling system, notably by launching various 'schemes' such as non-formal education, the Bihar Education Project, and the Total Literacy Campaign. Most of these schemes, however, are of a supplementary and ad hoc nature, and as far as the basic schooling infrastructure is concerned, there is no sign of major improvement. Nor is there any indication of elementary education becoming a major political concern.

In India, elementary education is a shared responsibility of state and central governments (i.e. it appears on the 'concurrent list'). In practice, state governments are the main actors. This is one reason why the reach and quality of the schooling system varies a great deal from state to state. A few states have succeeded in overcoming the syndrome of official neglect, with impressive results. The best example is Kerala, with its long history of public involvement in the promotion of education. There have also been major initiatives in Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh, which are progressing quite rapidly towards universal literacy in the younger age groups (see chapter 9). On the other side, official apathy is very resilient in the PROBE states. Some



## SCHOOL EDUCATION IN KERALA

A cardinal feature of culture and society in Kerala, and of Kerala's political and economic development, is the high proportion of literate and educated persons in the population. Mass literacy—and in particular female literacy—is an essential facilitator of Kerala's achievements in the spheres of health and of demographic change. Literacy is a foundational feature of Kerala's political culture, crucial in the creation of public opinion and essential to the consciousness of individual and political rights that is so conspicuous a feature of social and political life in Kerala.

The experience of Kerala is an excellent example of how literacy and education are of immense instrumental importance in social development. Kerala's performance with respect to certain crucial demographic indicators—for example, the expectation of life at birth, infant mortality, and birth and death rates—puts it once again in a different league from the rest of the country. The impact of female education on progressive health and demographic transition in Kerala has been recognized widely. The spread of education has also had profound implications—not easily captured in statistics—for political mobilization and for creating and sustaining demands for social and economic entitlements.

The proportion of total government expenditure spent on education in Kerala is higher than the corresponding proportion spent by other states, and most primary-school children go to state-run or state-supported schools. In the late nineteen-eighties, Kerala's non-plan expenditure per capita on primary education was the highest among 14 states.

Although public provisioning of education in Kerala has been more effective than elsewhere, traditional patterns of inequality have not entirely been eliminated. There are at least three social groups that are substantially behind the rest of the population in terms of education and other development achievements. These are the traditional coastal fishing communities, the people of the scheduled tribes of Kerala's highlands, and the underclass of the Tamil migrant workers in the state. Although these three groups are relatively small in numerical terms, the persistence of acute deprivation among them is an important cause of social concern.

The historical processes by which Kerala established itself as a frontrunner in education are complex; nevertheless, their main features can fairly simply be enumerated. Kerala got ahead because

- the link between mass education and mass schooling was recognized early in Kerala;
- social and political movements recognized the value of education and worked to overcome the three great obstacles to mass education in India, those created by caste, class and gender discrimination; and

- thirdly, efforts to build schools were supported by the state, which also made the investments necessary for mass schooling.

In the early nineteenth century, schools opened by Christian missionaries served as exemplars; they focused on the poor and the children of the oppressed castes, they encouraged the education of girls and, in addition to the religious aspects of education, they introduced courses of secular instruction.

Missionaries also influenced the state in Travancore. In 1817, the young ruler of the state, Rani Laxmi Parvathi Bai, issued the justly famous Royal Rescript that said :

the state should defray the entire cost of the education of its people in order that there might be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment among them. that by diffusion of education they might become better subjects and public servants and that the reputation of the state might be enhanced thereby.

For all the progress that was made in terms of educational policy during that period, there was no mass literacy at the end of the nineteenth century. Although official policy in Travancore and Cochin created what Richard Franke calls an 'official environment of support for education', it required female education, organized movements of people of the oppressed castes and, later, the left movement to establish comprehensive schooling and mass literacy.

Some of the worst forms of untouchability and distance pollution were practised in Kerala, and the emphasis on education in the social movements of the oppressed castes is remarkable. The most striking feature of the early history of the Izhava social-reform movement is the movement to gain access to primary education for all boys and girls, and to higher education as well. One of the first strikes of agricultural labourers in Kerala (it has been suggested that it was the first) was organized by Ayyankali of Travancore, the great ruler of the Pulaya masses, in 1914. After a resolute struggle, Ayyankali led a movement that gained admission for a Pulaya girl from an agricultural-worker family in a government school in Ooroottambalam near Thiruvananthapuram.

Mass literacy in Kerala as a whole is recent. When the state of Kerala was formed in 1956, the main priorities of its first government were land reform, food security, education and health. Land reform empowers the rural poor and helps facilitate their access to education. The extension of mass literacy to the rural poor, and particularly the rural poor in Malabar, took place after 1956 (the gap between Malabar and Cochin and Travancore in respect of literacy had widened during the period of British rule in Malabar). This was also the period when literacy spread decisively to backward districts in the state.

*V. K. Ramachandran.*



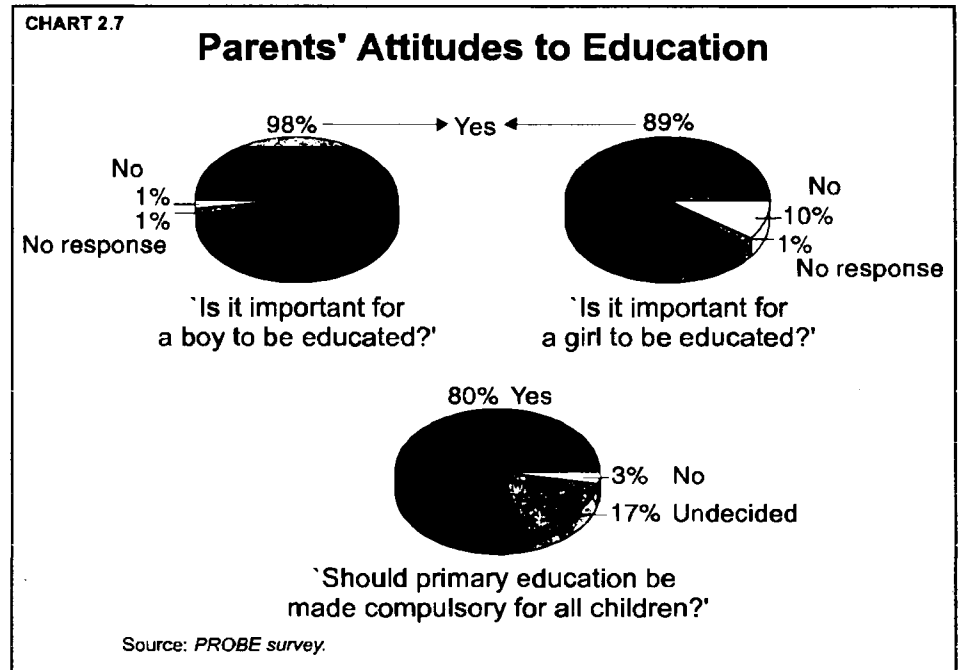
symptoms of this problem are: (1) declining teacher-pupil ratios, (2) frequent under-utilization of central government grants ear-marked for education, (3) chaotic implementation of centrally-sponsored schemes such as Operation Blackboard and the Total Literacy Campaign, (4) increasing reliance on second-track education facilities such as 'non-formal education centres', even when those are known to be ineffective and unsustainable. In some states, the distortion of priorities has reached extreme proportions. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, the right to elementary education has received less attention than, say, the right to cheat in examinations. And Bihar boasts the largest number of university professors in the country, despite a chronic shortage of school teachers. The issue of state inertia will be reconsidered in the concluding chapter, where we briefly discuss the politics of elementary education in India.

## 2.2. Some Myths

The reasons why so many children are out of school, as suggested by the PROBE survey, will be examined in the next chapter. Meanwhile, it may be helpful to debunk a few myths that have clouded clear thinking on this subject. Each of these myths contains a grain of truth, but this grain of truth has often been bloated out of proportion in public debates, leading to much confusion.

### Myth 1: Parents are not interested

One common myth is that most Indian parents have little interest in their children's education. This myth of parental indifference remains astonishingly widespread (especially in official circles, where it provides a convenient rationalization for India's low schooling levels). To illustrate, in its golden-jubilee analysis of India's failure to achieve universal elementary education, *The Times of India* (15 August 1997) confidently asserts — without evidence — that 'illiterate and semi-literate parents see no reason to send their children to school'. On the same



day, a similar article in *Indian Express* (written by a leading expert on the sociology of education) states: 'Although there is general awareness that literacy is a basic need and right of every person, it is not perceived as such by every individual. The vast majority of adult illiterates belonging to the poor economic stratum are not convinced of it.'

In contrast to this supposed indifference, we find that even in the PROBE states (where parental apathy is likely to be most widespread) most parents attach importance to their children's education. For instance, in response to the question 'Is it important for a boy to be educated?', the proportion of parents who answer 'Yes' is as high as 98 per cent (Chart 2.7). This is not to deny that parental indifference does exist in specific cases — this is the 'grain of truth' in the myth of parental indifference. Parental motivation for the education of girls, in particular, is lacking in a significant proportion of families. But the general pattern is not one of parental indifference. On the contrary, the 'typical' father and mother are very keen that their children should receive a good education. It is another matter that they do not always have much faith in the schooling system's ability to impart such education — we shall return to this problem.

### Myth 2: Child labour is the main obstacle

Another myth is that most out-of-school children are unable to study because they have to work. This widespread belief has been fuelled by shocking cases of full-time child labour in specific areas and occupations, such as carpet-weaving in Mirzapur or bangle-making in Firozabad. Some organizations claim that 65 million children in India are 'forced to work for more than eight hours a day' (Bandhua Mukti Morcha), or even that India has 70 to 80 million child labourers, working 12 hours a day on average (Coalition Against Child Labour). Following on that, the question is often asked: 'How can we make our country fully literate when 60 million of our children are engaged in full-time jobs as child labourers?' (*National Herald*, 2 January 1997).

The plight of full-time child labour is indeed distressing, and the above statements may have some shock value in helping to draw attention to this issue. However, as a factual description of the problem of child labour and its relation to schooling, these statements are misleading in three respects. First, they vastly exaggerate the *magnitude* of the problem.

## CHILD LABOUR IN FIROZABAD

*A member of the PROBE team visited Firozabad. His account :*

'We can't survive without children. They run much faster than adults and therefore production goes up,' the owner of a glass factory is reported to have said during a survey in 1986 — the same year in which The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act came into force. Children were found carrying molten glass, and working at furnaces in which the temperatures ranged from 800-1100° C. Curious to know if child labour was still a problem, I visited Firozabad in 1996. Firozabad city is clearly a land of glass and bangles: Every road is sprinkled with colourful fragments of glass and bits of bangles. But even more clearly Firozabad looks like a city of the poor and the wretched, with its abominable roads full of pot-holes and garbage, knee-deep water in some places, glass and bangle factories, gloomy residential areas dotted with small *bhattis* and *chimnis*, and most people living on the roadside in small *kholis*. And, of course, islands of riches.

The Deputy Labour Commissioner, Mr Uday Pal Singh was very helpful, and even turned out to be a committed administrator, known for his transparent dealings. Firozabad apparently is still plagued with hard-core child labour. One reason, says Mr Singh, is the attitude of the courts: their verdict often goes against the Labour Department. Another is bureaucratic apathy and corruption. Mr Singh told us of a senior IAS officer whose wife had ordered glass items worth more than Rs 10,000 when the two of them had visited Firozabad. The cost, he said, was borne by the labour inspectors who, in turn, connive with the factory owners and other defaulters. Mr Singh himself was a man under pressure. Threat to life is a problem which officers like him often faced. In fact, he had sought a transfer from Firozabad.

According to Mr Singh, his own predecessor had been suitably rewarded by factory owners for his inaction. It was only after the intervention of the National Human Rights Commission that the authorities were compelled to do something. A survey revealed that glass factories alone employed some 1,200 children in Firozabad. After the authorities intervened, and due to Mr Singh's firm attitude, the number of children working in glass factories (i.e. in the organized sector) had dwindled to a negligible level.

When I made unannounced visits to two glass factories, I found no children there. Two contractors marketing finished glass and bangle products confirmed that child labour in glass factories had declined and added that child labour had simply shifted to cottage and household industries. Mr Singh

agreed, and observed that this made application of the Child Labour Act difficult since restrictions on child labour apply only to factories and industrial premises.

I also visited special schools for erstwhile child labourers. It was encouraging to find that these were full-time day schools. Uniforms and mid-day meals were provided, as well as books and stationery. In the first school, 176 children (almost half of them girls) were enrolled, though only 90 were present. Three teachers were present. They said that pupil attendance had been low for a few days due to the *raksha bandhan* festival. Similar patterns were observed in two other schools.

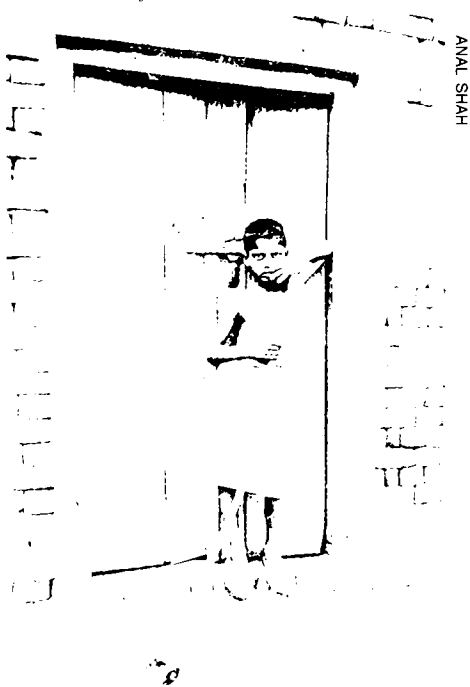
I talked with many people about the problem of child labour. The most interesting discussion was with the caretaker of the Dak Bungalow, who had three sons. The first two had studied until class 8, and were working as skilled *jari* workers in bangle factories, earning up to Rs 250-300 per day. The youngest son dropped out of class 3 and was now working in a nearby bangle factory. When I asked the father why the child had dropped out so early, he replied that there was no point sending the child to school when his brothers were earning handsome wages. The eldest son, he said, planned to open his own bangle unit, and would need more hands. The small boy would learn the skill at a young age and become productive. After all, he had acquired basic literacy. Further study was meant for earning, which the boy could do from a tender age anyway.

I talked to other parents too. In general they opined that what we call 'child labour' is, to them, a responsible working child — a self-employed child. An early start helps them to master the work at a young age, and to shoulder more household responsibilities. If employers were willing to employ a child, no parent in their condition of penury would want to renounce this opportunity. Some parents cited low wages as a reason for being compelled to let their children work. Household industries are low paymasters, constraining the family to complete as much work as possible to survive. They recognized this vicious cycle of low wages and child labour, but saw no way out of it.

I think of the deep poverty of ordinary people here; of the lure of easy employment in the glass industry, whether 'organized' or not; of the loopholes in the laws which govern child labour, of the many corrupt officials and the few honest and vulnerable ones. I am not surprised that the glass industry and the lives of children are still deeply intertwined in Firozabad. A few special schools do not seem to be enough.

Available data on labour force participation (from the census, the National Sample Survey, the PROBE survey, and related sources) clearly indicate that only a small minority of Indian children are full-time labourers. Second, these statements misrepresent the *nature* of the work performed by child labourers. The vast majority of child labourers work as family labourers at home or in the fields, not as wage labourers (see Chart 2.9). This distinction has a bearing on the relation between child labour and schooling; for

*Below : Out-of-school but not at work.*



ANAL SHAH

instance, the scope for adjustment in working hours is usually greater in family labour than in hired labour. Third, the above statements involve a simplistic reading of the *causes* of child labour and educational deprivation. Specifically, they suggest that full-time child labourers are unable to go to school because they have to work, rather than the reverse (i.e. that children work because they have dropped out of school). In practice, both patterns are possible.

Here again, the myth in question contains an element of truth, which must not be overlooked. The phenomenon of full-time child labour, though confined, is a disgrace (see p.15). Even for part-time child workers engaged in family labour, work is not always compatible with schooling. At times of peak agricultural activity, for instance, poor families may be under great pressure to mobilize children as full-time labourers. And that may be enough to exclude them from the schooling system altogether. These qualifications become more and more serious as the focus moves to progressively older age groups. The time utilization of children will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

CHART 2.8

### Estimates of Child Labour (All-India, Rural)

Proportion (%) of children aged 5-14  
who are in the workforce:

	Female	Male
Census of India, 1981	8.8	10.0
National Sample Survey, 1993	7.8	6.9
NCAER Survey, 1994	3.5	4.4

For definitions and sources, see Explanatory Notes.

### ■ Myth 3: Elementary education is free

Another myth is that elementary education in India is free, as directed by the Constitution. It may well be free, or nearly free, in the restricted sense that admission fees in government schools are negligible. But that does not mean that education is free in the more relevant sense that it involves no expenditure for the parents. Recent surveys indicate that the cash costs of education play a major role in discouraging poor families from sending children to school, especially when the quality of schooling is low.

The PROBE survey suggests that north Indian parents spend about Rs 318 per year (on fees, books, slates, clothes, etc.), on average, to send a child to a government primary school (chart 2.10). This is a major financial burden, especially for poor families with several children of school-going age. Thus, an agricultural labourer in Bihar with three such children would have to work for about 40 days in the year just to send them to primary school. Note also that, even at Rs 318 per year, the average child goes to school with scanty clothes and a depleted schoolbag. Only a minority of children, for instance, were found to be in possession of all the textbooks corresponding to their grade. The average expenditure of Rs 318 per year is well below real needs.

CHART 2.9

### Work Patterns of Out-of-School Children (PROBE States)

	Boys	Girls
Proportion who worked more than 8 hours on the day preceding the survey	20%	22%
Proportion who performed wage labour on the day preceding the survey	5%	1%
Average time of work on the day preceding the survey*	4.2 hours (3.3 hours)	5.1 hours (4.8 hours)
Extra time of work, compared with children who are attending school	2.1 hours	2.2 hours

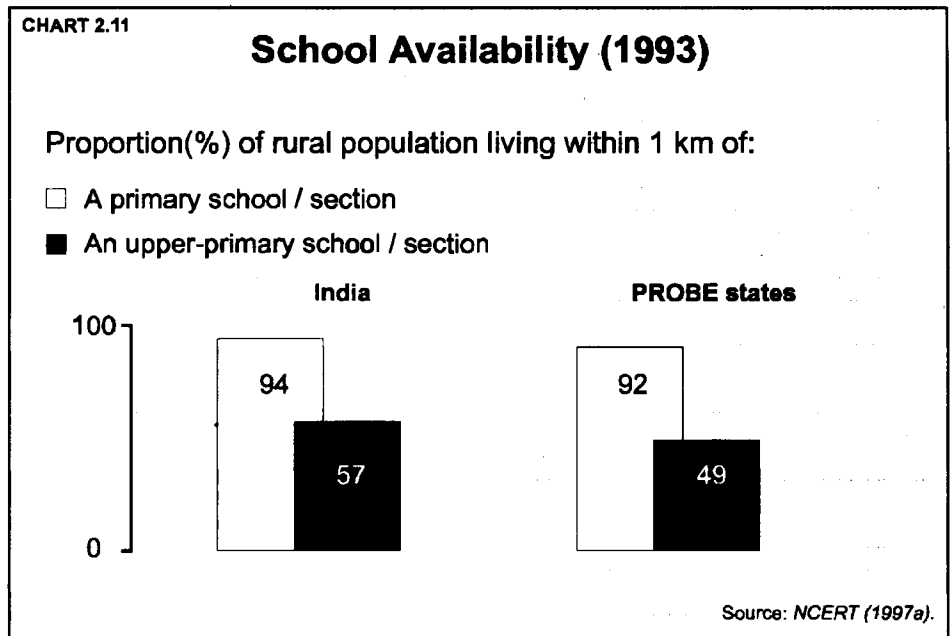
\* Median in brackets

Source: PROBE survey (random sub-sample of 333 out-of-school children in the 6-12 age group).

## ■ Myth 4: Schools are available

Much progress has been made, since independence, in the provision of schooling facilities. For instance, the number of primary schools has nearly tripled. In 1993, 94 per cent of the rural population lived within one kilometre of a primary school. Clearly, physical distance between home and school is much less of a problem than it used to be. Some go so far as to conclude that the problem has by and large been solved. According to the Department of Education's latest (1997-8) annual report, for instance, 'accessibility of schooling facilities is no longer a major problem' (p.30). This is another myth, for several reasons.

First, what needs to be considered is not just physical distance but also 'social distance', taking into account various barriers that may prevent a willing child from reaching the local school. In many areas, for instance, villages are divided into separate hamlets, and children from one hamlet may be reluctant or unable to go to school in another hamlet, e.g. due to caste tensions. Only half of all hamlets in rural India have a primary school, and in states like Uttar Pradesh, the proportion of such hamlets is as low as 30 per cent. For girls, restricted freedom of movement further enhances the problem of social distance.



Second, in assessing the physical adequacy of schooling facilities, it is crucial not to lose sight of the constitutional objective of universal education *until the age of fourteen*. This calls for the convenient availability not only of primary schools, but also of 'middle' (sometimes called upper-primary) schools with classes up to grade eight. Once the attention shifts to middle schools, the inadequacy of the schooling infrastructure re-emerges as a major problem. Only 29 per cent of the PROBE survey villages, for instance, have a middle school. And in rural India as a whole, 43 per cent of the population lives more than 1 kilometre away from the nearest upper-primary

school. Here again, girls are the main victims, because many parents are reluctant to allow their daughters to attend school in other villages.

Third, even the basic problem of physical distance from primary schools persists for a significant minority of families. The most obvious aspect of this problem is the absence of any school in some villages. In addition, adverse terrain is sometimes a major obstacle (especially for small children) even when a school is available within the village. In the Himalayan region, for instance, primary-school children often have to walk long distances uphill, or through forests and across streams, to reach the village school. These hurdles are no joke, particularly in the winter. If schooling is an inalienable right of all citizens, these outstanding problems of physical distance have to be resolved.

It should also be borne in mind that even when school facilities are *available* at a convenient distance, they are often *inadequate*, in terms of both quality and quantity. It is little use living within one kilometre of a primary school if the school is already overcrowded, or if it has a single teacher, or if the school is deprived of basic facilities such as a blackboard. As we shall see, these circumstances are far from unusual.

ANAL SHAH

CHART 2.10

### Average Cost of Sending a Child to School

(Rs/year at constant 1996-7 prices)

#### Primary Level

○ NSS estimate, 1986-7*	212
○ PROBE estimate, 1996	318

#### Elementary Level

○ NCAER estimate, 1994	478
------------------------	-----

\* Excluding clothing expenses

Source: NSSO, 1993; NCAER, 1996a; PROBE survey.



# 3

## CHAPTER THREE

# schooling and the family



SONDEEP SHANKAR

**A**nwar Hussain of village Jotri Peepal (Bharatpur, Rajasthan) has dropped out of school, much to the disappointment of his parents. Though they are both illiterate, the family has land and livestock. The parents were looking forward to Anwar doing the *hisab-kitab* for them. Anwar used to go to school, but he could not understand what the teacher said, and the teacher beat him often. Studies were boring and difficult. After class 4, Anwar refused to go back to school, no matter how hard his parents coaxed him to do so. Now he grazes cattle for four hours a

day, and spends the rest of his time playing.

**A**nwar's story is one among dozens of stories we have heard from drop-out children and their parents. It is not 'representative' by any means. Indeed, as we shall see, there are many different ways in which a child can find himself or herself excluded from the schooling system. Anwar's story, however, highlights one point that emerges again and again from these testimonies: that in rural India, sending a child to school on a

regular basis requires a great deal of effort on the part of the child and his or her parents.

Effort may be required for various reasons: the costs may seem prohibitive; time may be lacking to prepare the child for school in the morning; he or she may be needed at home or in the fields; the child may be deterred by a hostile environment at school, or by physical punishment; no-one may be available to help him or her with homework; lack of progress at school may sap the morale of parents and children, and so on. In the light of these obstacles, it is easier to understand why so many children are out of school even when their parents express

a strong interest in education. This contrast between aspirations and achievements is one of the main concerns of this chapter.

### 3.1. Parental Views on Education

#### Overall motivation

We have already noted in chapter 2 that the general level of interest in education among Indian parents is quite high, even in the lagging states covered by the PROBE survey. Many parents, in fact, clearly said that education was indispensable in modern society. Examples of statements to that effect are: 'jo nahin padhega vo har ek tarike se nuksan mein rahega (an uneducated person will always be in trouble)', 'ghar mein padha-likha vyakti hai to koi chinta nahin rahti hai (if there is an educated person in the house, there is no need to worry about anything)', 'anpadh aadmi asani se thaga jata hai (an uneducated man is easily cheated)'. Several respondents went so far as to say that 'an uneducated person is like an animal (bina padha aadmi janwar saman hai)'.  
 One indication of the rising tide of educational aspirations is that the proportion of children who have never been enrolled in a school ('never-enrolled'



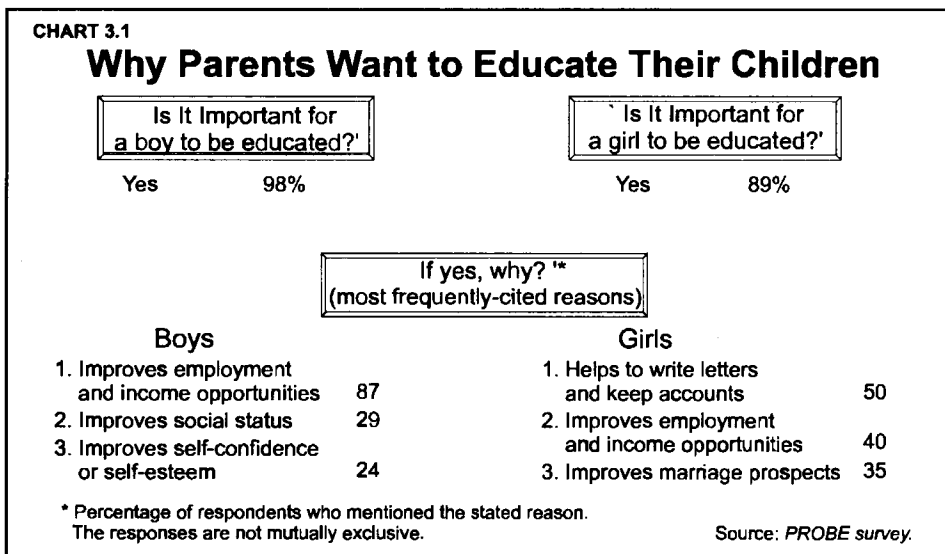
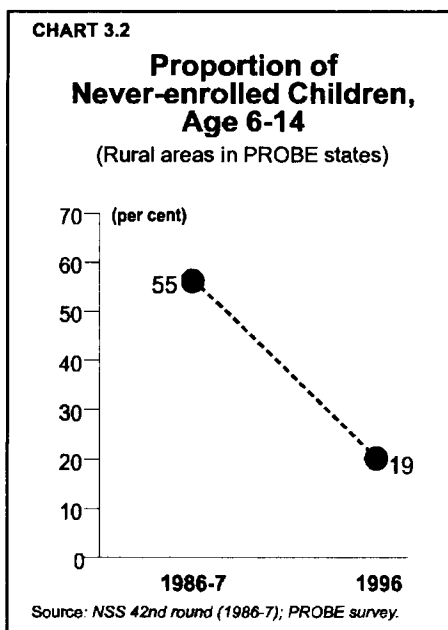
ANAL SHAH

children) is declining quite rapidly. Ten years ago, according to the National Sample Survey, these children accounted for about half of all rural children aged 6-14 in the PROBE states. For 1996, this proportion is estimated from PROBE survey data to have declined to around 20 per cent (Chart 3.2). In other words, today most parents give schooling a chance.

#### High motivation despite adverse circumstances

*Ram Rati is a fourteen-year old tribal girl who lives in Balner (Betul, M.P.). Her parents, who subsist on agriculture and wage labour, are poor and illiterate. Yet, Ram Rati walks six kms every day to the middle school in Vijaygram, where she studies in class 7.*

Many other signs of high and rapidly-growing parental interest in education came to our attention in the course of this study. Here are some examples: (1) most parents support compulsory education for all children (see p. 14); (2) private schools are springing up in many villages, and even poor parents often enrol their children in a private school if the local government school is not working (see chapter 8), (3) when the government of



Madhya Pradesh announced that it would create an education centre on request in any hamlet where schooling facilities are not available, more than 15,000 requests were received within a year mainly from tribal areas.

## ■ The gender bias

While the gap in educational aspirations between different social groups is narrowing rapidly, these common aspirations give very unequal attention to boys and girls. Most parents (mothers no less

than fathers) expressed much stronger interest in their sons' education than in their daughters'. To illustrate, the proportion of parents who stated that education is *not* important for girls is as high as 10 per cent — compared with only 1 per cent in the case of boys (p. 14). Similarly, responses to the question 'How far would you like your son/daughter to study?' clearly reveal that parents have much higher expectations for their sons than for their daughters (Chart 3.4). Many other indications of the gender bias were found in the survey, both from the quantitative and the qualitative data.

The gender bias is so strong that it makes little sense to lump boys and girls together when discussing the motivation of parents for education. From their point of view, male and female education are very different matters. The relevant motives in each case are discussed below.

## ■ Motivation for sons' education

Why are parents so interested in the education of boys? The overwhelming reason is economic: parents are hoping that their sons, if educated, will have better employment opportunities (see Chart 3.1).

As a dalit father from village Madarpur (Moradabad district), put it: '*Padha likha hoga to naukri karega, bijnus karega, dukan ka karya bhi acchha karega. Use saphalta milegi.* (An educated boy can get a job, can do business, can run a shop properly. He will be successful.)'

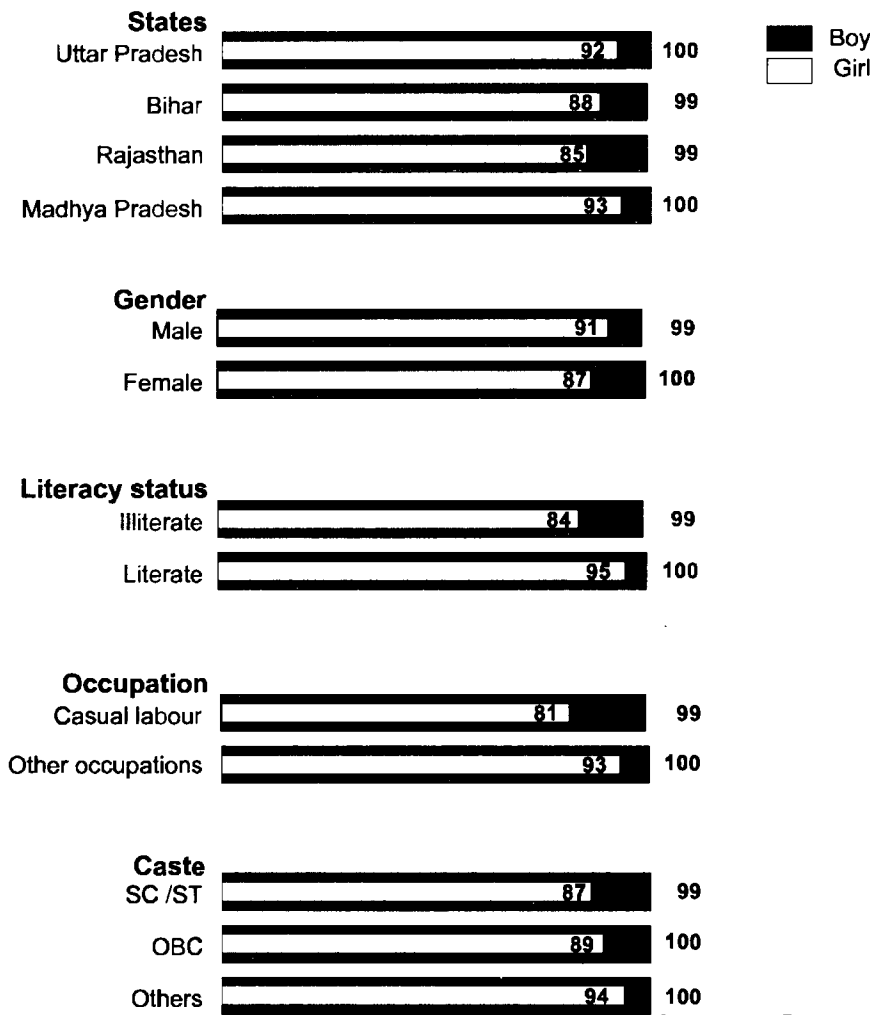
This predominance of the 'employment motive' has been noticed in a number of earlier studies. Some may consider it as a narrow and materialistic motive, and deplore the fact that social pressures are such that so many parents think of education chiefly in terms of its economic value. This misgiving is understandable, and it is right to stress the non-economic value of education. At the same time, there are no grounds for berating the economic aspect. Poor parents have good reason to yearn for better employment opportunities, and to think that education may help in that respect.

Further, it would be a mistake to think that parents care *only* for the economic benefits of education. On further probing, they do perceive a number of non-economic benefits as well. Chief among those is the role of education in improving one's self-esteem and social status (Chart 3.1): '*Hoshiyar ban jayega* (becoming smarter)', '*samajhdar ho jayega* (better understanding)' and '*doosron se baat karne mein kathinai nahin hogi* (confidence in talking to others)' were some common expressions used to convey this sentiment. Related to this is the feeling that education helps to defend

CHART 3.3

### Parental Motivation and Social Background

Proportion(%) of respondents who consider it important for a boy/girl to be educated.



one's rights. For instance, education helps 'not to be scared of officers', 'to get information about what benefits are available', and 'to fill forms'. Other benefits of education mentioned by PROBE respondents included 'apna bhala bura samjhega (will understand what's good for them)', 'kheti achha karega (adopt better farming practices)', 'kahin bhi ghoom-phir sakta hai (can go where he likes)', and 'davai pahchan sakta hai (distinguish between medicines)'. Taken together, these responses add up to a fairly perceptive understanding of the individual and social benefits of education, at least as far as male education is concerned.

**'Sabhi bachhe padhenge to unko apna adhikar milega. (If all children study, they will get their rights.)'**

*A young man from Sotawa (Morena, M.P.).*

**'Samaj mein padhe-likhe logon ko hi ijjat mil paati hai. (Society only respects those who are educated.)'**

*An OBC labourer in Jaitro Banjari (Palamau, Bihar).*

## ECONOMIC RETURNS TO ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

In mainstream economics, education is treated as an 'investment'. International studies of economic returns to education suggest that (1) education is one of the best investments developing countries can make, (2) economic returns to education are highest for primary schooling and decline with rising levels of education, and (3) female education has higher economic returns than male education.

Studies focusing on India lead to similar results. For instance, a study on Andhra Pradesh found that the earnings of adults with primary education are twice as high as those of illiterate persons. Compared with mere literacy, primary education enhances individual earnings by 20 per cent. A recent analysis of National Sample Survey data for Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu finds that each year of extra schooling raises men's productivity by 8 per cent and women's productivity by 10 per cent. Another study, which focuses on inter-state comparisons of productivity and growth, suggests that an increase of one year in the average educational attainment of the workforce raises output by 13 per cent. As in other countries, economic returns to education in India are estimated to be higher than the returns to other investments, highest at the primary level, and higher for female than for male education. The direct economic returns to the society from investment in primary education in India have been estimated to be above 20 per cent.

Had India striven to improve the quality of education, the returns would have been even higher. The poor quality of education has indeed restricted the quantum of returns.

*Based on contributions from J.B.G. Tilak and Jeemol Unni.*

## Motivation for daughters' education

In understanding parental attitudes to female education, the first thing to note is that north Indian parents tend to think of a daughter's upbringing mainly from the

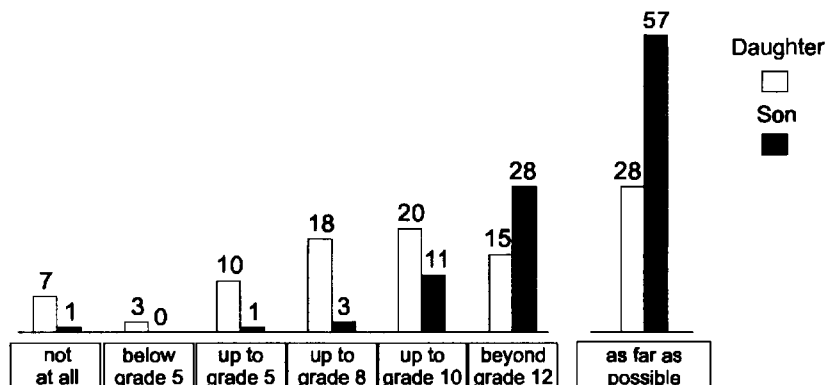
point of view of her marriage. At the time of marriage, a north Indian daughter typically leaves her family and joins her husband's family in his village. From then on, her relationship with her parents is quite distant — hence the view of marriage as the ultimate goal of a daughter's upbringing. In the case of sons, the situation is very different, since male children remain close to their parents after marriage and often look after them in old age. Another crucial contrast is that the employment opportunities of adult women are much more limited than those of adult men. These social norms, of course, are changing over time (especially in urban areas), but they still have a strong hold today.

One consequence of this outlook is that some parents are quite *indifferent* to a daughter's education. From their own point of view, it doesn't really make much difference, since she is going to leave them anyway. Further, the employment motive for investing in education, so powerful in the case of boys, is much weaker for girls. This sentiment of indifference transpires

CHART 3.4

### Educational Aspirations

'How far would you like your son/daughter to study?'  
(Percentage of responses)



The figures for 'sons' are based on the responses of parents who have a currently-enrolled son (and similarly with 'daughters').

Source: PROBE survey.



in many of the comments made by parents who stated that it is 'not important' for a girl to be educated. Examples of such comments are: 'We marry daughters at a young age anyway', 'What's the use? She is not going to go out and work', 'We don't educate girls in our community', and 'She should learn to do what she will have to do when she grows up: keep house'.

---

**'Padh-likhkar ladki kya karegi?**

**Usko ghar ka kaam karna hai.**

*What's the point of a girl studying?*

*She has to do housework.'*

*An OBC labourer from Doodapura,  
(Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan).*

---

**'Hamein apni ladki ko padhana  
hi nahin hai.**

*On no account will we  
educate our daughter.'*

*Another resistant Rajasthani male.*

---

The crucial role of marriage considerations also appears in the positive reasons that were given by other parents for wanting to educate daughters (Chart 3.1). Interestingly, the most frequently cited reason was that an educated daughter would be able to write letters and keep accounts. Foremost in many respondent's minds, especially among women, was the thought that a married daughter should be able to get in touch with her parents in times of crisis, or to maintain some kind of contact even otherwise. Other common motives for female education, again linked with marriage, are that it improves the prospects of a good match, helps a daughter to raise her own children, and makes it easier to cope with widowhood or divorce. Some parents went beyond these marriage-related considerations, and did mention other aspects such as better employment opportunities. The latter were mentioned by 40 per cent of the respondents, a much lower figure than the corresponding figure for sons (87 per cent), but nevertheless an interesting indication that women's employment opportunities are increasingly viewed in a positive light.

*Parents desire  
much higher  
education  
levels for sons  
than for  
daughters.*

---

*'...education is so important for girls.  
Marriage becomes easier, teaching their  
children becomes easier, facing  
widowhood or divorce becomes easier.'*

*An illiterate dalit labourer in  
Mujahidpur (Muzaffarnagar, U.P.).*

---

*'It is important to educate boys, but it is  
even more important to educate girls,  
because they have to manage the entire  
household. Also, everyone nowadays  
wants an educated bride.'*

*An Ahir farmer from Baridih  
(Ranchi, Bihar).*

---

Going back to the common problem of parental indifference to female education, the great danger of this attitude is that it leads many parents to give up as soon as the expenditure or effort involved in sending a daughter to school rises above a low threshold. It is not so much that they have any principled opposition to female education, but rather that they are unwilling to invest much in it. As one father from Singapatti (Mathura, U.P.) bluntly put it, 'Education means spending money and I can't afford to spend so much on girls.'

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**'Ladki ko padhane ke liye hamare paas  
paise nahin hai. Aur gaon mein shadi  
kam umar mein hi ho jati hai.  
(We don't have the money to educate  
girls. And in the village, girls are  
married off at a very young age.)'**

*A dalit woman from Doodapura (Sawai  
Madhopur, Rajasthan).*

---

Even among those who positively want their daughters to be educated, the desired level of education is quite low. As Chart 3.4 indicates, an overwhelming majority of parents want their sons to study beyond (often well beyond) class 8, but many parents have no such expectations for their daughters. A substantial minority does not even expect a daughter to study beyond the primary level. One specific reason for this (aside from the general problem of lack of parental ambition for female education) is that parents are often reluctant to let their daughters study outside the village. This underlines the continuing problem of inadequate supply of upper-primary schools, discussed in chapter 2. Another specific reason is that, in some circumstances, a well-educated daughter is harder to marry.

## ■ Education, marriage and caste

Asked whether educating a daughter made it easier or more difficult to get her married, 73 per cent of the respondents said 'easier' and 27 per cent said 'more difficult'. To reconcile these responses, we have to distinguish between marriage prospects and marriage costs. Education may give a bride better prospects of finding a 'good' husband, and at the same time raise the cost of her marriage because social norms require her to marry a better-educated husband. How parents handle this dilemma is likely to depend both on their financial means and on their concern for their daughter's future well-being.

Much would also depend on the responsiveness of marriage prospects and marriage costs, respectively, to a daughter's education. If parents expect marriage costs to rise sharply with her education, they may be that much less inclined to send her to school. In this respect, one important factor is the general level of education (especially male education) in their caste or community. In, say, a community with high levels of male education, educating a daughter up to the primary or even upper-primary level may

not raise the costs of her marriage very much, since there are plenty of better-educated grooms around. In communities with low levels of male education, however, parents may be more apprehensive about educating a daughter, for fear of not being able to find a suitably educated groom for her at a reasonable 'price'.

**'Garib ki ladki nahin padh paati hai kyonki padhai par paisa adhik kharch hota hai. Aur vivah par bhi dahej dena padhta hai padhi likhi ladki ko. (Girls from poor families are not able to study because it is too expensive. Also, to get an educated girl married, one has to give a dowry.)'**

*Forty-year old Suta Das, an agricultural labourer in Ram Khangooray (Muzaffarpur, Bihar).*

This reasoning is consistent with the PROBE responses. Among the better-educated castes, the tendency was to say that, up to a point at least, a daughter's education made her marriage easier. Further comments included: 'The first question of the boy's family about the girl is *'Kitni tak padhi hai* (how far has she

studied)?'; *'Ladki acchi hone se ladka samajhdar mil jata hai* (it is easier to find a sensible boy if the girl is educated); and 'Educated girls are valued as brides because they run their houses well'.

Among disadvantaged castes, a few respondents felt that educated brides were in high demand, e.g. due to their better employment opportunities ('nowadays the government also gives jobs to women'). But many others took the view that educated daughters were difficult to marry. If we educate our girls, they said, we will have to find an educated husband for them, and educated families ask for a higher dowry (*'note mangenge, motor-cycle mangenge'*), complained one mother. As a poor *dhobi* from Uttar Pradesh put it, *'Achhe ladkon ka bhi abhav hai* (there is a shortage of good boys)'. Another explained that 'to find an educated bridegroom, we would have to look in a more distant place'. In castes with a strong patriarchal tradition (not necessarily the poor or less well-educated ones), some parents also feel that the boy's family is unlikely to have any interest in an educated bride: 'Girls only need to do housework and go to their in-laws' house; nobody wants to marry an educated girl.'

**'Shadi mein pareshani hoti hai. Achhe parivar ke ladke vaale ise pasand nahin karte. Ladki ko naukri to karni nahin. (It is a problem to get educated girls married. Good families don't like educated girls. It's not that girls are going to get a job.)'**

*A farmer from Singapatti (Mathura, U.P.).*

*Parents give up on educating a daughter as soon as the expenditure or effort involved in sending her to school rises above a low threshold.*



## ■ The social dimension of motivation

So far we have discussed parental views on education as if they stood on their own, independently of other parents' views. In reality, however, parental attitudes are highly interdependent: what one person thinks about the value of education may

be strongly influenced by other persons' views on this within his or her family, community or neighbourhood. In that sense, the motivation for education has an important social dimension.

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**'Padhane se kuchh to faida hoga tabhi to bhej rahe hain. Sari duniya bhej rahi hai.**

*(Obviously there is some benefit from education. That is why we are sending the children to school. The whole world is sending them.)'*

*Rajwati, an illiterate OBC woman from Khurd (Dholpur, Rajasthan).*

---

To illustrate, when asked why their daughters never went to school, some parents simply say 'girls don't go to school in our community'. In other words, they are following what they see as a social norm. Some go on to say that *if* other parents sent their daughters to school,

*If schooling is a social norm for the community, girls are sent to school.*

then they would send their own daughters too. As these statements bring out, the social dimension of education can have both positive as well as negative influences.

Another interesting illustration comes from a Gujjar woman who, when asked whether she felt that it was important for a girl to be educated, said: 'How do I know? I have never met an educated woman in my life'. Here again, the coin has both positive and negative sides: just as people's understanding of the value of education can be limited because of a lack of familiarity with educated persons, it can also be enhanced by the influence of 'role models'. In some villages, for instance, we noticed that the woman who ran the *anganwadi* (pre-primary childcare centre) had raised people's awareness of the employment opportunities of educated women.

It is worth noting that the social influence of role models depends a great deal on what people see as the relevant 'reference group'. Suppose, for instance, that a high-caste boy in a remote village gets a good job after completing his studies. This is likely to raise the perceived value of education for high-caste boys. Whether this experience has any impact among low-caste families, however, depends on how far they consider themselves to share the same employment opportunities. Similarly, its impact on the perceived value of female education may or may not be significant, depending on the nature of the gender division of labour. Generally, if a society is sharply divided on the basis of class, caste and gender, the influence of role models is likely to be more confined. This point will come up again in chapter 9.

Further evidence of the social dimension of education comes from parents' responses on compulsory education. Asked 'Would you approve of primary education being made compulsory for all children?', a large proportion (80 per cent) answer 'Yes' (see chart 2.7). Note also that most of the other respondents are neutral or undecided rather than opposed to compulsory education, and that even those who oppose it do so mainly on

practical rather than principled grounds: some of them, for instance, feel that it is pointless to enact another law that will not be applied, others that it is futile to send children to non-functional schools. On the whole, the attitude of parents towards compulsory education is overwhelmingly positive. One reason for this is precisely that they grasp the social dimension of schooling, and see that many parents would be encouraged to send their own children to school if others did so too. (In some cases, they also see compulsory education as a means of protecting children from negligent parents.

---

**'Mere samay mein aisa kanoon rehta to aaj main bhi padha-likha hota. (If there had been such a law in my time, I would be an educated man today.)'**

*A thirty two-year old dalit labourer from Karma (Ranchi, Bihar).*

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**'The country will progress. For instance, pesticides will be used properly. Last year, pesticides meant for wheat were used by illiterate farmers for chana.'**

*A twenty seven-year old tailor from Tigariya Sancha (Dewas, Madhya Pradesh).*

---

The social dimension of parental motivation points to the possibility of achieving a *social consensus* on the need for every child to go to school. A consensus of this kind has indeed been achieved in Kerala. As one researcher observes, when parents in Kerala are asked why they send their children to school, some of them don't know what to say, simply because they take it as self-evident that going to school is what children do. There are other interesting illustrations of the possibility of achieving a social consensus on education being an essential part of every child's upbringing, notably in Himachal Pradesh (see chapter 9). Building such a consensus is a crucial aspect of the universalization of elementary education.

## ■ Can motivation be influenced?

We have seen earlier that parental motivation is not immutable: parents are much more concerned about their children's education today than they were fifty or even ten years ago. Recent changes in parental attitudes towards female education are particularly encouraging. Not so long ago, negative views of female education were endemic among north Indian parents (one such view, among the more extreme ones, was that an educated woman was likely to become a widow). Today, most parents consider at least some education as an important part of a daughter's upbringing, even if their ambitions in that respect continue to be modest.

Parental motivation is likely to continue to rise in the future, perhaps more rapidly than most observers expect today. It is natural to ask whether this trend can be accelerated through public intervention. Our answer is yes.

Indeed, the PROBE survey suggests that some positive achievements have already been made in that respect. Employment reservation policies, for instance, have clearly played a role in enhancing the educational aspirations of parents from disadvantaged castes. Similarly, we found much evidence that the provision of school meals or food rations, free textbooks and other incentives had an effect on the willingness of parents to send their children to school. Even without material inducements, it seems that parental motivation for education can be

strongly influenced. This has been amply demonstrated by the Total Literacy Campaign, in districts where this campaign has received the full support of political leaders and popular organizations.

Before concluding on parental motivation, we should mention that high interest in education on the part of individual parents goes hand in hand with a certain amount of *collective inertia* in schooling matters. Parents seldom translate their private complaints about the local school into constructive action, or even into collective efforts to draw the attention of teachers or administrators to the deficiencies of the schooling system. This inertia, in turn, has various roots such as the powerlessness of parents and the social divisions that fragment village communities. We will return to these issues in chapter 5.

### THE TOTAL LITERACY CAMPAIGN

Chronically drought-prone Pudukottai in Tamil Nadu is one of India's most backward districts. More than 85 per cent of its people live in abject poverty. A transformation in the lives of these people began in 1991 with the launch of the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) covering almost 250,000 learners, 70 per cent of them women. An impressive instance of women's empowerment in the wake of the Total Literacy Campaign relates to stone-quarrying. A syndicate of private contractors had traditionally exploited workers, mostly women, in over 450 stone quarries in Pudukottai. In 1991, when contractors did not bid above the minimum price set by the government, the District Collector decided to lease the quarries to over 4,000 women who had organized themselves into 152 groups. Control over the quarries greatly increased their economic security. This is a case where women linked the TLC to livelihoods. They not only acquired basic educational skills, but also obtained special training in leadership, decision-making, management and business organization.

The voluntary campaign mode was first tried out by the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad which mobilized the local administration, non-governmental organizations, volunteers, social activists and citizens to ensure that, by 1990, Ernakulam district was declared 100 per cent literate. Since then, the

National Literacy Mission has been instrumental in encouraging other states and districts to adopt the TLC mode.

Where actively implemented, the TLC has enabled millions to read and write. It has opened up extraordinary opportunities especially for women and those belonging to socially backward castes. The TLC has helped to change societal attitudes, modify notions of institutional responsibilities, and revise concepts of social accountability. Significant changes are noticeable in the self-esteem and confidence of women. Another major achievement of the TLC in many districts is that it has boosted the demand for elementary education, leading to higher enrolment, improved accountability, and greater parental expectations from the schooling system. The campaigns have also promoted greater social cohesion. For instance, the Expert Group evaluating the TLCs in 1994 reported: 'During the height of communal tensions in 1990-2, the campaign areas specially in the village areas did not witness any major communal disturbances. Incidents with communal potential were nipped in the bud by the villagers and major disturbances averted.'

Concerted public action in the TLCs has imparted more than just reading and writing skills; it has ushered in a consensus for greater learning and societal change.

*Based on contributions by Arun Ghosh and Nitya Rao.*



Right:  
Poor parents often see  
education as an  
opportunity for their  
children to join the  
ranks of salaried  
employees or the  
urbanized  
middle-class.

## 3.2. Educational Hopes and the Schooling System

High parental motivation for education does not necessarily lead to regular school attendance, or even school enrolment. For one thing, motivation for education need not be the same as motivation for *schooling*: parents may be convinced of the value of education, and yet feel that the schooling system fails to provide much education (or the kind of education they are looking for). For another, even if parents are keen to send their children to school, they may be *unable* to do so for various reasons: lack of facilities, high costs of schooling, need for the child at home, and so on. These two issues are taken up in this section and the next one, respectively.

### Wanted: 'Quality education'

The distinction between motivation for 'education' and interest in 'schooling' raises a simple question: What *kind* of education are parents looking for? An approximate answer to this question is

that what they aspire to is not very different from what most readers of this report are likely to want for their own children — 'quality education' in the common sense of the term.

This statement has a positive as well as a negative side. On the positive side, it means that poor parents are concerned about the quality of education, and also that what is judged to constitute quality education does not vary fundamentally between different social groups. This contrasts with the notion, common in elite circles, that privileged families need one type of 'quality education' while poor families need another type.

One specific example of such double standards is the widespread notion that poor parents want their children to learn various manual skills at school, rather than to acquire intellectual knowledge. The premise for this view seems to be that manual skills are 'more useful to these children' than literacy, numeracy, critical enquiry and related abilities. The PROBE survey found little support for this view among ordinary parents. If anything, they seem to have some aversion towards manual work at school. The main concern, for most parents, is that children should develop their intellectual abilities

— manual work at school is seen as a diversion. This does not mean that including some manual work in a school curriculum is a bad idea, indeed there are strong pedagogical arguments for doing so. The point is that (a) the case for manual work at school does not lie in parental demand, of which there is very little, and (b) the pedagogical argument applies to *all* children, not just those with a working-class background.

Coming to the negative side of our earlier statement, it says that parents aspire to quality education 'in the common sense of the term'. Common perceptions of what constitutes quality education, unfortunately, are heavily influenced by the dominant value system. To a large extent, education is seen by poor parents as an opportunity for their children to join the ranks of government employees and the urbanized middle-class. These 'role models' may have little education in the sense of Tagore (see p.6), but at least they have degrees, and these are widely seen as the main purpose of going to school.

One particular aspect of this outlook is a certain resistance to pedagogical initiatives that challenge the dominant value system. Rural parents, we found, are rather conservative in schooling

matters. Far from clamouring for alternative pedagogy, they are quite at home with traditional teaching methods, school uniforms, formal examinations, and even physical punishment. Recent attempts to popularize 'joyful learning', for instance, have often been met with scepticism. One parent went so far as to complain that 'teachers send their own children to convent schools, but make village children dance like monkeys'. This is not to deny that joyful-learning methods may be extremely useful in sustaining the interest of children, or to claim that the scepticism of parents is immutable.

*'Aspirations have become so universalized that today it is practically impossible to distinguish between the dreams of an average family anywhere in the country, for their children's future. They both covet the same centralized system: Board exams, English medium, uniforms, plenty of books and homework. Pioneering and innovative attempts at modifying the curriculum to make it more contextual and relevant, reducing the burden of books, teaching in local dialects, and lowering costs by employing 'non-degree holders' are all perceived as discriminatory and against their interests by the common man... Given the opportunity they would rather put their children in the most elitist school within their means, just as we would.'*

*(SIDH, a non-government organization with a long-standing experience of educational initiatives in the U.P. hills. Similar impressions arise from the PROBE survey.)*

**S**ocial perceptions of what constitutes 'quality education' may improve in the future, and this should be seen as one part of the long-term agenda of transforming the education system. The more immediate problem is that quality education, *however defined*, involves certain minimal requirements (such as adequate facilities, responsible teachers, an active classroom and an engaging

curriculum) which are simply not met at present. The dismal condition of the schools precludes quality education of any kind, and is the main reason why high parental motivation for education often combines with open contempt for the schooling system.

## ■ The discouragement effect

**R**ukmini is the only daughter in a family of four children in village Sarwana (Ujjain, M.P.). She has never been to school. Her mother, forty-year old Tejubai, is wild with the local government school. 'If we send the girl to school, we have to pay a labourer to replace her, and the girl learns nothing. What do we gain? See this other child who is in class 5. She knows nothing. My son Parkash studied till class 6 — he knows nothing.'

**S**imilarly, eleven-year old Chander Pal's lack of progress in school in Mujahidpur (Muzaffarnagar, U.P.) has greatly discouraged his father: '*Bachhe ko barabar guide nahin milne se pichhad gaya hai; bahut kamzor hai* (without regular guidance the child has been left behind; he is very weak).' Another parent voices his anger with the school there: '*Char saal ek kaksha mein padha do, phir bhi bachhe ko kuchh nahin ayega* (put a child for four years in the same class, he still won't learn anything).'

**A**s these stories illustrate, parental hopes of quality education are often massively frustrated. This, in turn, discourages them from sending their children to school regularly even when they have a genuine interest in education. The above stories are not isolated cases, and the 'discouragement effect' is experienced to varying degree by a large number of parents. Their complaints about the schooling system are endless.

**S**low progress at school is one of the main causes of parental frustration. Though the PROBE survey did not include a formal assessment of pupil achievements, interviews with children made it clear that many of them had learnt very little at school. For instance, we found

numerous cases of children who, like Parkash, were still unable to read (or even to recognize two-letter words) after several years of schooling. This picture of dismal pupil achievements, especially in deprived areas, is consistent with other recent studies (see Box, p. 28).

**T**here are also other reasons why parents have little faith in schooling, even when they regard education as highly valuable. For instance, they may feel that education is a good thing but that it is not really achievable *for them*. Or they may consider that the benefits of education are important only beyond a certain stage, and that there is little chance of their child reaching that stage. These and other variants of the discouragement effect have to be kept in view in interpreting schooling decisions, especially among disadvantaged families.

## ■ Child reluctance

**T**he discouragement effect applies not only to parents but also to children. The initial disposition of children towards schooling is usually positive. When a school functions, their motivation is easily sustained. In fact, in the better schools, it is a joy to see children's enthusiasm and drive to learn. Even in schools where classes are far from exciting, children often look forward to going to school: it is a chance to interact with other children, a welcome change of atmosphere, and a liberation from the chores of family labour.

**'Ghar ka kaam karna padta hai; isliye skool jane mein maja aata hai. (I have to do all the housework; that is why I like going to school).'**

*Anju, an eleven-year old girl from Vishanpura (Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan).*

**B**ut there are also many cases of children being gradually discouraged from attending school. One common cause of discouragement is beating or humiliation from the teacher. '*Padhate kam, maarte zyada* (teaches too little, beats too much)' is one child's succinct view of his teacher,

shared by many a pupil. In Jaitro Banjari (Palamau, Bihar), ten-year old Rajesh is keen to study and become a *daroga* (constable), but the master beats him so much and explains so little that he is on the verge of dropping out. It is, in fact, not uncommon for a child to actually drop out after being terrorized by the teacher. Beatings from classmates, lack of comprehension and plain boredom are other possible causes of discouragement. Social discrimination at school (e.g. neglect of dalit children by upper-caste teachers) is another common cause of child reluctance, especially among disadvantaged families.

**‘School mein thik se padhai nahin hogi, phir kya faida padhne se.**  
*(What’s the point of studying when there is no proper teaching at school?)’*

*A ten-year old boy from a dalit family in Udaipur (Dhanbad, Bihar).*

Whether it applies to children or parents, the discouragement effect is particularly common in underprivileged families. The frustrations of a non-functioning school, for instance, are particularly hard to bear for those who cannot afford private tuitions and are unable to create a learning environment at home. Similarly, first-generation learners and their parents are highly vulnerable to the discouragement effect: illiterate parents often find it difficult to judge what goes on in the classroom, to get a hearing from the teacher, and of course to help their children with their studies. Not infrequently, they end up blaming themselves or their children for the failures of the schooling system.

### 3.3. The Challenge of Regular Attendance

Even in families that are not ‘discouraged’ by the schooling system, sending a child to school on a regular basis can be a major challenge. Two

## PUPIL ACHIEVEMENTS IN MADHYA PRADESH

‘*Padhai achhi nahin hoti* (the teaching isn’t good),’ is Nandu’s uncle’s comment as soon as the local primary school in Tigariya Sancha (Dewas, M.P.) is mentioned. ‘*Padhai achhi nahin hoti,*’ he repeats, as his nephew fumbles and fails to read the simple text.

Nandu is 10, and has been to school for four years. He can make out individual letters but cannot pronounce a single word. His elder sister, who dropped out after class 3, cannot read either. Nor can his friend Chena Lal who is in class 5.

Whatever has been happening (or not happening) inside the classroom? Chena Lal offers us one answer: Nothing much has been happening inside the classroom. The teachers rarely taught — and when they did teach it was usually by asking the pupils to copy out sections of the Hindi book. Chena Lal has confirmed what Nandu’s uncle knew already: sending Nandu to school has been a waste of precious time and money.

Nandu’s is not an isolated case of failure to learn much at school. Here are a sample of findings from recent studies of pupil achievements in Madhya Pradesh:

- A study of schools located in a privileged urban zone in Madhya Pradesh found that 60 per cent of class-5 pupils had not mastered competencies in Hindi or mathematics that would be expected of class-2 students. In an impoverished rural zone of the same state, no class-5 pupil had mastered these competencies (Govinda and Varghese, 1993).
- Similar findings are reported in a study of ten schools in Patan and Katni blocks of Jabalpur district. In Patan, pupil achievements were uniformly poor — class-2 students could barely write their names. In Katni, achievements were higher, but still far from impressive: among class-2 pupils, 82 per cent could copy from the textbook, but only 54 per cent could read, and 19 per cent could write from dictation (Gupta et al., 1997).
- A study of fourteen functional schools in Betul district found that half of the children who had passed class 3 were unable to add two numbers of two digits each, without ‘carry-over’. Only 5 per cent could do a similar addition with ‘carry-over’.
- A summary of studies on pupil achievements by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (Sharma, 1998) considers that in Madhya Pradesh ‘only 15 per cent of fourth-graders can be called literate’ in the sense that

common obstacles are the dependence of the family on child labour, and the high costs of schooling.

### Work vs. study?

Upendra is a ten-year old boy from village Sanwarsi (Dewas, M.P.). His parents own no land or other productive assets, and are heavily indebted. Unable to provide schooling to all their children, they have decided to concentrate their resources

and efforts on Upendra’s younger brother and sister. Upendra himself dropped out after class 4. He now helps to support the family by carrying bricks at nearby construction sites. He works the whole day for a meagre wage.

Upendra’s story illustrates the tragic problem of full-time child labour. As we saw in chapter 2, however, only a minority of out-of-school children are in this situation. Upendra’s own story is quite exceptional, among the testimonies collected

by the PROBE survey. According to this survey (and other recent studies), the vast majority of young out-of-school children in rural areas are in a very different situation: they work mainly as part-time family labourers, helping their parents at home and in the fields.

What is not entirely clear is the extent to which the demands of family labour clash with schooling. To shed some light on this, Chart 3.5 presents some data on the time utilization of a random sub-sample of out-of-school children from the PROBE households. The sub-sample is relatively small, and the results are only suggestive. However, they confirm a basic pattern observed in a number of other studies: that the work hours of young out-of-school children in rural India are relatively short. On average, boys aged 6-12 who are not attending school worked for around four hours on the day preceding the survey — about two hours more than school-going boys. In the case of out-of-school girls, work hours are a little longer: about five hours on average, again two hours more than school-going girls (chart 2.9).

These figures have to be read in the light of the fact that school hours in rural India are quite short. In practice, a village school is typically open for about 150 days in the year. On those 150 days, the school is



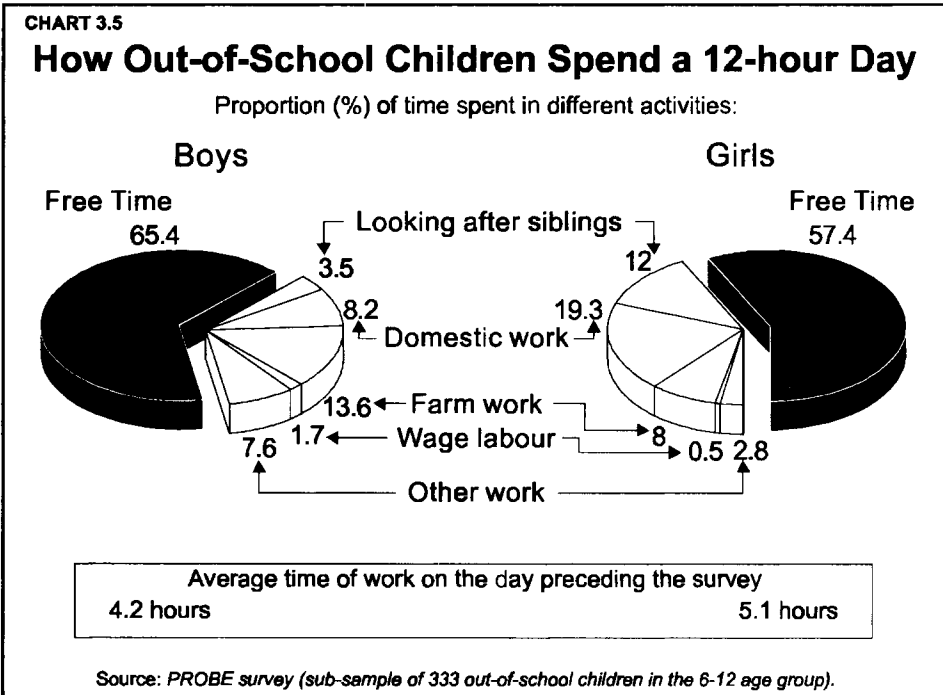
UNICEF



ANAL SHAH



UNICEF



open for at most six hours, often much less. Unless family labour involves rigid work hours that consistently clash with school timings, it is unlikely to prevent children from attending school with reasonable regularity. And the observations of PROBE investigators suggest that, in many cases, the activities involved (e.g. fetching wood, grazing animals, and various types of domestic work) do allow relatively flexible work hours.

In interpreting Chart 3.5, it is also important to bear in mind that, when children work rather than go to school, the direction of causation need not run from child labour to non-attendance. In many cases, it is the other way round: children work because they are unable to go to school. Eight-year old Manoj in village Karanjia (West Singhbum, Bihar), for



## SCHOOLING IN AMBEDKAR NAGAR: TEACHERS' VIEWS AND PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS

In the sprawling, crowded low-income colony of Ambedkar Nagar in south Delhi, most children do get enrolled in one of the 30-odd municipal primary schools or the growing number of small private schools. But survival up to class 5 proves more difficult: children either leave school or come and go intermittently.

As part of a survey of schooling in Ambedkar Nagar, we asked both municipal school teachers and parents why children did not reach the end of the primary stage. Parents and teachers came up with very different explanations.

Teachers claimed that since many residents are new migrants and retain strong ties with their village communities, the families often return to the village for festivals and functions, or for the harvest season. This can cause absence from school for as long as two months. This disruption causes major problems for the child: catching up is tough because of the adverse home environment, and in extreme cases the child may even have been struck off the rolls during his or her absence. Child labour is also mentioned by teachers as a major reason for pupils leaving school or not attending regularly.

Parents told a completely different story. Far from being new migrants, over 70 per cent of them had lived in Ambedkar Nagar for 10 to 15 years. Movement between village and city was not frequent or for long periods. One mother explained the situation thus: 'We sold our house in the village when we came here. I wish we could go back to my village but where will we stay? The relatives' houses are also full. And it is very costly for the whole family to travel. Besides, how can I leave my work for so long, and who will take care of the old people if I go away?'

Contrary to teacher perceptions, full-time or continuous employment for children outside the home was not common either. Not a single family had a child under the age of twelve working outside the home on a permanent basis. Children do run errands, assist in chores, stand in queues for water and kerosene, look after siblings. But since school hours are short (four and a half hours each day), most of them can combine these responsibilities with going to school.

The hostility between teachers and parents is clear in the interactions between them, and has even led to incidents of violence. Caste and class factors enhance these tensions, for the teachers have BA or MA degrees while parents have no formal education. Teachers regard postings in these poor neighbourhoods as hardship postings. Parents complain that teachers have no sympathy for the predicament of poor pupils. Children are the innocent victims of this mutual antagonism.

*Rukmini Banerji.*

instance, dropped out in class 1 because of being teased and beaten by other children; now he spends the whole day taking the cattle out to graze.

Having said this, there are situations where children have rigid work duties that may be difficult to reconcile with schooling. Two specific cases are worth noting. The first case concerns eldest daughters in poor families with several children. Consider, for instance, eleven-year old Simla, the eldest daughter of a poor adivasi family in Benipura (Morena, M.P.). She does the housework and the child-care so that the parents can go and work as labourers. Her brothers and her younger sister are enrolled, but her parents see no way of sending her to school. Many eldest daughters, like Simla, are mobilized by their parents to look after younger siblings. Sometimes they do so for sheer convenience, and the real problem is a lack of commitment to the education of daughters. In other cases, e.g. when both parents work outside the home, child care is a real issue. One possible solution to this problem lies in collective arrangements for child care, such as *anganwadis*. Several states do have functioning *anganwadis*, but the performance of the north Indian states in this respect is very poor.

Second, in some families there is a problem of dependence on full-time child labour during periods of peak agricultural activity. Consider, for instance, nine-year old Ashok who is in class 3 in the government school in Ladoonda (Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan). He is the only son of a dalit farmer with three acres of land. His father says that Ashok does not go to school when harvesting needs to be done. In principle, short-term absence should not lead a child to drop out of the schooling system, but in practice this often happens. One solution is to adjust the school calendar and timings, say district-wise, so as to avoid any serious clash with agricultural activity. This approach has been successfully adopted in some states (notably Himachal Pradesh), and there are possibilities of extending it elsewhere. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that calendar adjustments are genuinely geared to the needs of deprived children

## THE CHILD MOTHERS

Eldest daughters in rural families often have to forfeit both their childhood and their education. Bina Kumari of village Baridih (Ranchi district, Bihar) is only one among several such children encountered during the PROBE survey. Her mother works as an agricultural labourer and her father does construction work. When Bina was in class 3, her mother fell ill and she was made to drop out of school to do the housework. Now she is twelve and works ten hours a day looking after the house and the younger siblings, and taking the cattle out to graze. In her spare time she sometimes looks at her brothers' textbooks, striving to make sense of them.

Ironically, several circumstances could have worked in Bina's favour. The family is reasonably well-off with several *pacca* rooms, a cycle and seven heads of cattle. Bina's father claims very high motivation for education for both boys and girls. Certainly the other children are all enrolled.

Bina seems all set to continue the life of labour. In this community girls are married off anywhere between 13 and 16 and life in the marital household will in all probability require no less sacrifice and hardship than the life she leads now. Bina's father, for his part, will be relieved to pay less dowry for his hard-working little daughter since she is not educated. In his community educated girls have to pay more dowry.



## ANGANWADIS CAN HELP

'*Skool jayegi, jab ye sab bade ho jayenge* (she will go to school when these grow a little older)', was the father's answer when we asked when eight-year old Radha would be enrolled in school. We looked around at Radha's siblings, aged six months, two years and three years, and wondered if that day would come late — or never. Radha's mother had to go out to the fields and could not do without her help at home.

Radha's predicament could have been avoided had a creche or child-care facility been available. This is indeed one of the aims of the *anganwadis* run under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). In fact, a well-functioning ICDS centre is meant to provide much more. It would look after the nutrition and health-care needs of pregnant and lactating women. It would enable poor women and their elder children to go to work or school without constraints. It would even look after the developmental needs of the young children placed in its care.

A well-functioning *anganwadi* has much to contribute to the success of schooling. If pregnant women are looked after then babies are less likely to have a low birth-weight, with all its attendant problems. Providing the right kind of stimulation as well as food to small children helps their healthy development. And a good pre-school programme enhances the readiness of young children to enter school.

The performance of *anganwadis* in the PROBE states, however, is very poor. To start with, coverage is patchy: barely one-third of the sample villages had an *anganwadi*. Secondly, an *anganwadi* is judged purely on the regularity and quality of the mid-day meal it supplies to the children. Even by this basic criterion, most parents felt that the facility was not satisfactory. Thirdly, *anganwadis* had no linkage with the primary schools, either in terms of their location or in terms of fulfilling the needs of elder caregivers.

In Himachal Pradesh, by contrast, about half of the villages have a functioning *anganwadi*, and 85 per cent of these *anganwadis* are considered as 'satisfactory' by the local headteacher. One comparative study of schooling in Sirmour district (H.P.) and Allahabad district (U.P.) found that the functioning of *anganwadis* was very poor in Allahabad but reasonably good in Himachal Pradesh. This is one of the circumstances that have helped Himachali women to send their children to school in spite of their heavy work-loads (see chapter 9). In Kerala, the situation is even better: 99 per cent of the villages have an *anganwadi*.

Schooling is a major financial burden, especially for poor families with several children of school-going age.



SONDEEP SHANKAR

### ROKKAIYA BEGUM'S UNIFORM

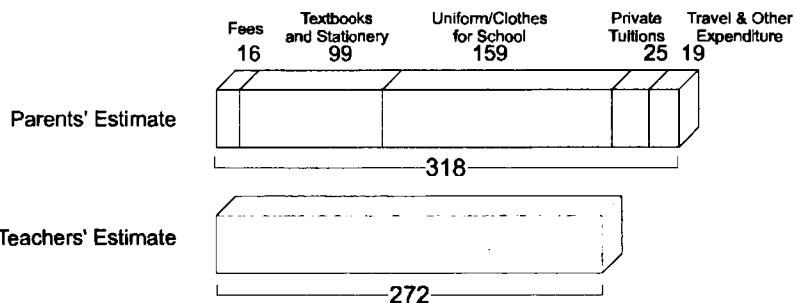
When she was in class 2, Rokkaiya Begum missed school for fifteen days as her parents could not afford to buy her a school uniform. Her name was struck off the rolls. Poverty causes many children to drop out when their parents cannot afford the incidental expenses which crop up. In Rokkaiya's case it was the school uniform, which was compulsory in those days, but it could even be something as simple as a slate or a textbook.

Once children have dropped out it is often difficult to get them back to school. Today, uniforms are no longer compulsory in Rokkaiya Begum's school. Rokkaiya's siblings are all enrolled. She remains at home.

CHART 3.6

## Schooling is Expensive

Average cost of sending a child to a government primary school: (Rs/year)



Source: PROBE survey (sub-sample of 831 children enrolled in government primary schools).

and their parents, rather than to the convenience of teachers or school administrators.

### ■ Schooling is expensive

'*Garibi bahut hai, kahan se padhaenge* (we are very poor, how can we educate them)?' is a fair summary (due to a poor farmer from Pahai in Gazipur, U.P.) of the sentiment of many poor parents. In fact, 'schooling is too expensive' came first (just ahead of the need for child labour) among the reasons cited by PROBE respondents to explain why a child had never been to school. As noted in chapter 2, survey data on schooling expenses confirm that the cash costs of sending a child to school are far from negligible.

A breakdown of these costs is presented in Chart 3.6. The total costs as reported by parents are quite close to teachers' estimates, suggesting that the data are reasonably reliable. The most expensive item is clothing, followed by 'textbooks and stationery'. Interestingly, expenditure on girls tends to be a little *higher* than expenditure on boys. This is not because of a bias against boys, but reflects the higher perceived costs of female clothing.

The average cost of sending a child to school works out at Rs 318 per year. This may not look high, but it is a substantial burden for a poor family. Two further remarks are due. First, this figure reflects actual expenditure, not the expenditure

that would be required to cover a pupil's basic needs (in terms of clothing, textbooks, stationery, and so on). Many children go to school in rags, and with only a few of the textbooks they are supposed to possess.

Second, parents do not have the freedom to meet the annual expenditure of (say) Rs 318 as and when means permit; rather, they are often constrained to produce cash at short notice to meet immediate needs (such as a new textbook or set of clothes).

This creates a potential liquidity problem, even when the annual expenditure is otherwise affordable. The liquidity problem is one reason why households with at least one member in regular wage employment seem to find it much easier to send their children to school than other households.

The costs of schooling can be substantially reduced through public policy. School meals, free textbooks and scholarships are some of the means that can be used in this respect. Here again, major initiatives have already been taken in some states (e.g. Tamil Nadu and Kerala), but the general pattern remains one of limited and haphazard intervention. The national school-meal programme, for instance, is yet to take off (see chapter 8). Another important means of action is to improve the quality of schooling: how much parents are prepared to spend on schooling depends a great deal on what they perceive to be getting in return.

## HEALTH AND SCHOOLING

A recent survey conducted in four villages of Palghat district (Kerala) and three villages of Allahabad district (Uttar Pradesh) examines the link between health and schooling. The survey indicates that convenient access to basic health-care in Palghat is an important reason for high school attendance. In the district of Allahabad, where school attendance is much lower than in Palghat, access to health-care was not only more limited but also more regressive. Respondents pointed out that they often had to seek private treatment as facilities in government hospitals were available only to those who had the right contacts. In government hospitals, patients often had to pay for services that are meant to be provided free of cost. As one poor woman remarked, 'We do not have the reach to avail of government hospitals. They do not give medicines or anything. Whatever the government gives to the hospital they just sell it in the block.'

As would be expected, illness was less frequent in Palghat than in Allahabad. Few children in Palghat had to miss school either due to their own illness or on account of having to care for an ailing family member. In Allahabad there were cases where children had been withdrawn from school for long periods on account of a family member's prolonged illness. Further, girls were the first to be withdrawn when a family member's illness increased the work-load in the house.

A telling sign of poor health care in Allahabad is the high infant mortality rate. Nearly half the women interviewed had lost at least one child; several had lost three or more. Common child diseases included diarrhoea, tetanus and fever. 'Shall I worry about the survival of my children, or their schooling?' asked one woman. This remark came as a strong reminder that when life is so precarious, health is a higher priority than schooling.

Another consequence of high infant mortality was high fertility. Mothers in Allahabad felt that many children were needed to ensure that at least some of them survived to adulthood. Over half of them had five or more children. In Palghat, by contrast, most women with two or three children had opted for sterilization. This reveals both their confidence in the survival of children, and their access to safe sterilization.

High fertility reduced the schooling prospects of children in several ways: (1) It reduced the resources (time, energy, money) available to each child; (2) It increased the work-load on elder daughters, who are often expected to look after younger siblings; (3) Complicated pregnancies drained financial resources and disrupted the normal functioning of the household, making it harder for children to attend school regularly.

In short, schooling and health facilities complement each other: better health-care makes it easier for children to go to school, just as better education helps people to utilize health facilities. Better health-care would also help to reduce gender disparities in school attendance.

*Nidhi Mehrotra.*

## ■ Other hurdles

So far in this section, we have focused on the major economic costs of schooling: the opportunity cost of child labour and the direct costs of schooling. These are very often perceived by parents as the main obstacles. Many other hurdles, however, can stand in the way of regular school attendance. Absence of a school at a convenient distance, and lack of interest on the part of the child, are two important examples that have already been discussed.

Illness in the family is another common problem. PROBE investigators came across a number of pupils who had fever, and many parents said that illness was among the reasons why their child was occasionally absent from school. Young children are particularly vulnerable to common infectious diseases. Illness even causes some children to drop out, as resuming studies after a prolonged absence from school can be difficult. Illness of *other* members of the family can also interfere with a child's studies, e.g. as the costs of schooling become harder to bear or as help is needed at home. In Kedal (Palamau, Bihar), a seven-year old boy dropped out because his father fell ill and he was asked to help in the fields. We also found several cases of a daughter being kept at home to manage the household because her mother was unwell.

Another hurdle may be described as 'alienation': some parents simply feel that the schooling system is 'not for them'. This feeling can arise in various ways. There may be no tradition or culture of schooling in their caste or community. The teachers may treat them with indifference, contempt or even hostility. Their children may be discriminated against at school. For these and other reasons, some parents conclude that it is better to stay away.

Whether they take the form of high schooling expenses, or economic dependence on child labour, or inaccessible schooling facilities, or illness in the family, most hurdles are more forbidding for girls than for boys. In many families, the education of daughters is treated as an

## 'MY SCHOOLING WAS ENDED'

'I feel bad that my schooling was ended,' said the young girl. 'I was a good and regular student. I always answered the questions asked in class correctly and because of that I got the teacher's appreciation. I want to go back so I can make something of my life and give my village a good name.' As she spoke the bitterness suddenly became too much and she burst into tears. This girl had studied upto class 6 but her schooling had ended abruptly at puberty when her parents decided she had studied enough and should now learn housework.

The girl's sadness was echoed by other girls who were interviewed in the course of a study of six villages — two each in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The villages were socially and culturally diverse, but reasons why children had dropped out bore remarkable similarities. A sample of 62 drop-out children (32 boys and 30 girls) in the 10-14 age group were interviewed. The reasons for dropping out turned out to be very different for boys and girls. All except 2 of the 30 girls had dropped out due to some domestic crisis or parental pressure. Boys, on the other hand, had usually abandoned their studies owing to their own disinterest, illness or failure in examinations: parents had rarely pressed their sons to drop out.

Girls are more easily withdrawn from school for a combination of social and economic reasons. To start with, household work and child-care are seen as the responsibility of daughters. Secondly, the economic returns to education are perceived to be high in the case of boys in all six villages. Boys are assets in whose education it is sensible to invest. Girls, for their part, are expected to leave their natal homes after marriage. When resources are scarce (most parents were cultivators or labourers), the education of boys is given priority.

In the two villages in Madhya Pradesh, there were many examples of families where girls had been withdrawn from school as the loss of their labour was felt to be too costly to bear. 'While I was my parent's only child, I was sent to school. But then I had to leave school to care for my two younger sisters and a brother,' said a thirteen-year old girl who had dropped out in class 3. 'My mother simply refused to send me to school because she has to go to work,' said another. All the girls who had dropped out were engaged in household work. Drop-out boys, on the other hand, were engaged in wage labour or the family enterprise. All but one of them had left school of their own accord.

Similarly in the two villages in Maharashtra none of the drop-out girls had left school voluntarily — they had been withdrawn because they were felt to be needed at home.



Here, for example, a girl had left school in class 7 when her uncle decided that the time had come for her to tend the cattle. A similar contrast was found in the two villages of Tamil Nadu, with all the girls who had left school doing so in response to domestic demands. However, these girls were engaged in labour outside the house as well as within. Four out of five boys in this state had abandoned school out of personal choice.

Girls are also victims of parental anxiety. According to parents, daughters study only as far as school facilities within the village permit, because it is not safe to send a girl out of the village to study. In Digma (Madhya Pradesh), for example, where the local school went up to class 5, few girls had studied beyond the primary level. In Kanur (Tamil Nadu), where the village school taught up to class 8, a majority of girls had reached this level.

Although parents are positive about male education, this still does not translate into high achievement levels. In every sample village except one, parents were dissatisfied with the performance of the village school.

*Veena Kulkarni.*

expendable item, easily renounced if a difficulty arises. The perceived lack of economic returns to female education (at least for the parents) contributes a great deal to this attitude. When a household finds itself unable to send all the children to school, the tendency is to give priority to boys.

### 3.4. Schooling as a Popular Struggle

In a middle-class family, sending young children to school on a regular basis is a relatively simple affair. The children are raised from early on in an education-friendly environment; there are few other demands on their time; they are healthy and well-fed; the costs of schooling are not prohibitive (unless the family opts for expensive private education); the parents know how to deal with the teachers and the bureaucracy; there is someone at home to help the children with their homework; and so on. It is, thus, easy for policy-makers and other observers with a privileged background to forget that in poor

rural families — where none of these favourable circumstances apply — sending children to school is an exacting struggle.

One aspect of this struggle is that cruel choices may have to be made between schooling and other opportunities. Sending a child to school may mean less money to buy seeds or medicine, more back-breaking work for her mother at home, or fewer resources for another child's education. Another aspect is that many different obstacles may come up, ranging from relatively obvious ones such as household dependence on child labour and the high costs of schooling to more subtle ones such as child reluctance, poor health, and the discouragement effect.

The chain of circumstances that make it possible to send a child to school on a regular basis is only as strong as its weakest link. This is one reason for the *fragility* of the school attendance process in many underprivileged families. Another crucial reason is that leaving school is, by and large, an irreversible process: once a child has dropped out, even for a relatively short period, it is often hard to send him or her back to school.

The fragility of the school attendance process struck us on many occasions during the field survey. Here are some examples:

- In Mohangarh Bhata (Tikamgarh, M.P.), one girl dropped out after being hit *once* by her teacher. In another village, a boy was not allowed by his teacher to continue because 'proper uniform was not worn'. Elsewhere, a child refuses to go to school when her slate is broken.
- 'An ox was bought when the child was in class 4; after that she was needed at home.' (A parent in Tigariya Sancha, Dewas.)
- 'If the demand for *khurpis* is high, I keep my son Ramji at home to help me.' (An artisan in Shivtara (Faizabad, U.P.), who makes *khurpis* for the whole village.)

As far as public action is concerned, our findings point firmly to the need for improving the quality of schooling. Parents are much less likely to give up the struggle to educate their children if they feel that the village school provides quality education. As will be seen in the coming chapters, much can also be done to reduce the private costs of schooling, influence parental motivation, and so on. But these efforts are unlikely to have a dramatic impact on their own as long as parents have little faith in the village school.

Further, the case for improving the quality of schooling is not confined to what this could do to attract more children to school. No less important is the fact that so many of those who do go to school get little from it. As noted earlier, for instance, PROBE investigators found quite a few cases of able children remaining illiterate after several years of schooling. This is an extreme illustration, but the basic problem of wasteful school attendance is widespread.

*Poor parents are more likely to keep up the struggle to send children to school — if schooling is of satisfactory quality.*



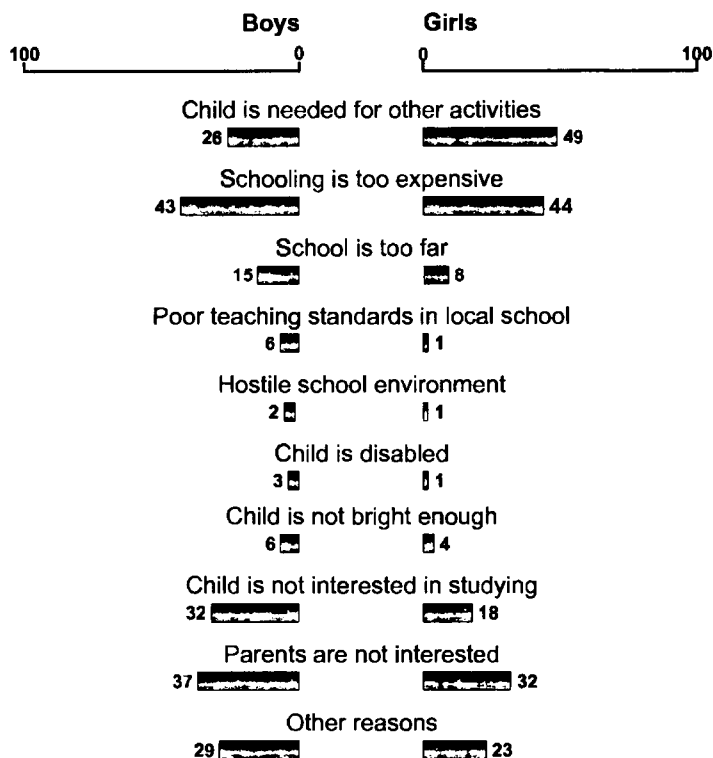
UNICEF

## WHY CHILDREN ARE OUT OF SCHOOL: PARENTS' SURVEY RESPONSES

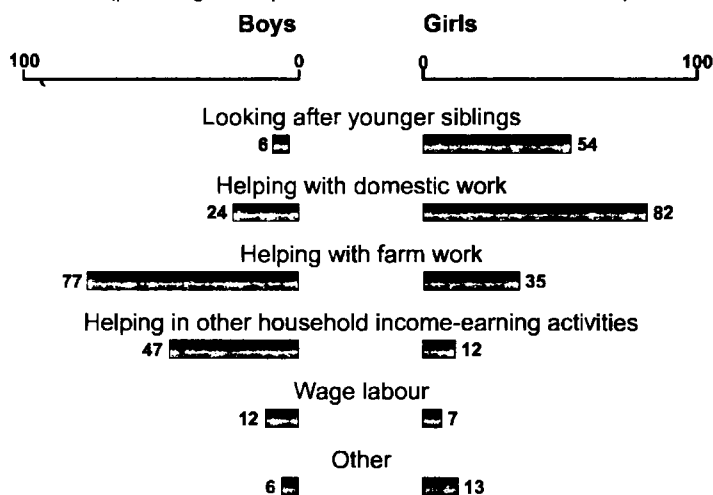
CHART 3.7

### Never-enrolled Children

1. Why has this child never been enrolled in any school?  
(percentage of respondents who cited alternative reasons)\*



2. If the child is needed for other activities, what are these activities?  
(percentage of respondents who cited alternative activities)\*



\* The listed responses are not mutually exclusive.

Source: PROBE survey (random sub-sample of 226 never-enrolled children in the 6-12 age group).

In section 3.3, we have discussed the difficulties encountered in sending children to school, using both survey data and parental testimonies. Some further evidence on parental perceptions of this issue is presented in Chart 3.7 and 3.8. These charts are based on interviews with parents of a random sub-sample of never-enrolled and drop-out children, respectively. In both cases, the sample size is small, so that the results are only indicative. Also, there may be some response biases here. For instance, parents who are unwilling to spend much money on a daughter's education may find it convenient to claim that she is 'needed at home'. Nevertheless, these responses suggest a few interesting patterns.

First, the economic constraints (both the need for child labour, and the burden of schooling expenses) dominate the perceived obstacles. There is also some indication that the child-labour factor is more important for girls than for boys — mainly in the form of daughters being mobilized for domestic work. For boys, the need for child labour is not a frequently cited reason for non-enrolment, probably because a boy aged 5 or 6 is not seen to have much to contribute to the household economy. Male child labour, however, does play a significant role as a cause of dropping out.

Second, child labour overwhelmingly takes the form of helping parents at home or in the fields, rather than of full-time work outside the household. Wage labour, in particular, is not a common reason for a child being out of school. In the case of girls, child labour consists mainly of domestic work and looking after siblings.

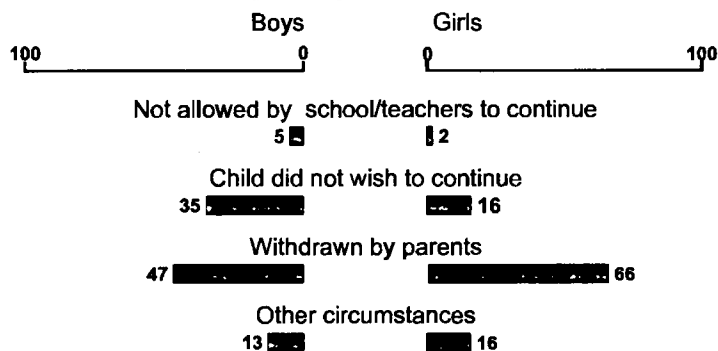
Third, child motivation matters. For instance, in more than one-third of the cases of male drop-outs, the stated reason was that the child did not wish to continue studying. It appears that if a child is unwilling to go to school, the parents may not be able to persuade him or her to go. This finding is consistent with the perceptions of the field investigators.

Fourth, in about one-third of the cases of never-enrolled children, lack of parental interest in schooling was reported as one of the reasons. In the case of girls, this pattern is consistent with the fact that 10 per cent

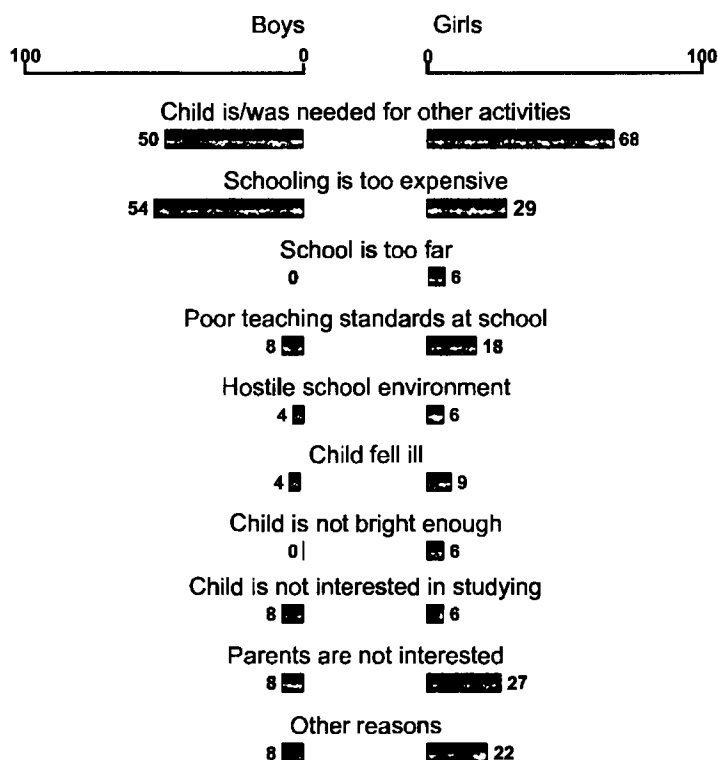
CHART 3.8

## Drop-out Children

1. Which of the following best describes the circumstances whereby this child dropped out?  
(percentage of responses)



2. If the child was withdrawn by parents, explain why:  
(percentage of respondents who cited alternative reasons)\*



\* The responses are not mutually exclusive.

Source: PROBE survey (random sub-sample of 106 drop-out children in the 6-12 age group).

of parents do not consider it important for a girl to study (see section 3.1). In the case of boys, it may seem surprising that 'lack of parental interest' should be so frequent, given the high level of motivation for male education. One clue to this apparent tension is the distinction between interest in *education* and interest in *schooling* (see section 3.2). It is the latter that gets reflected in Chart 3.8.

Finally, it may seem surprising that 'poor teaching standards' is not a more frequently reported cause of non-enrolment and dropping-out (except implicitly, e.g. as an underlying cause of 'lack of parental interest' in schooling). At first glance, this does not square with endemic complaints about the quality of schooling. In interpreting this pattern, two points have to be borne in mind. First, the effect of poor teaching standards is a slow sapping of parental and child motivation over time, but the 'last straw' that causes a child to drop out is often something else, e.g. illness in the family or financial hardship. Respondents are more likely to report this last straw as the cause of discontinuation than the slow process of discouragement. Second, there is another crucial difference between 'poor teaching standards' on the one hand, and (say) 'schooling is expensive' on the other, as reported reasons why a child is out of school. In the latter case, the parents may remember having to decide between two concrete alternatives, e.g. (in this case) to spend or not to spend on the child's schooling. Similarly, the response 'child was needed in other activities' reflects a concrete decision about alternative household arrangements. In the case of school quality, however, there is no such choice to make: the village school is the village school, and for most parents there is no other option. When a parent gives up the struggle to get a child educated, he or she is likely to report that the struggle had become too hard (e.g. schooling was too expensive), without adding that *had* the village school been up to the mark, it might have been worth soldiering on. The latter situation, indeed, is in the realm of the imagination. This, too, helps to explain why 'poor teaching standards' were not often mentioned by parents as the reason for their child being out of school, even though many of them had bitter complaints about the state of the village school.



# 4

## CHAPTER FOUR

# the school environment



SONDEEP SHANKAR

Our Constitution fathers did not intend that we just set up hovels, put students there, give untrained teachers, give them bad textbooks, no playgrounds and say, we have complied with Article 45 and primary education is expanding... They meant that real education should be given to our children between the ages of 6 and 14.

*(Shri M.C. Chagla, Education Minister, 1964)*

**S**ix-year old Reena is not keen to go to school in the morning, and it is not difficult to understand why. When the PROBE investigators visited her school in Salempur (Muzaffarnagar, U.P.), they found the little children of classes 1 and 2 huddled together like *bhed bhakri ka jhund* (a herd of sheep and goats). The other children crowded the three small, dark and dirty rooms which make up the school building. The premises were gloomy and virtually bare, not a great surprise since the building has no lock.

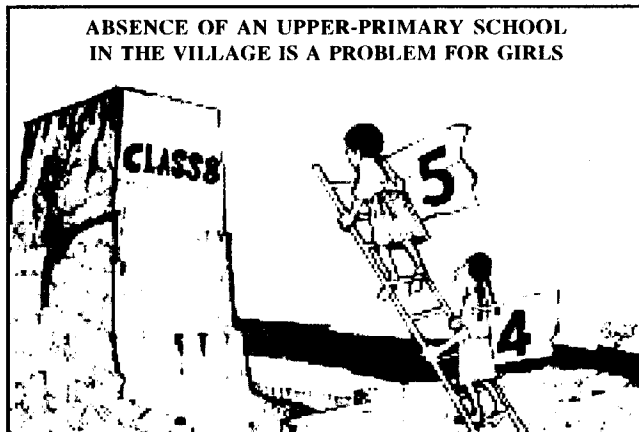
**T**he school's four teachers are equally unmotivated. Except for the headmaster, none of them were teaching when the investigators arrived. The class-1 teacher did not look as though he had anything to do with his small charges. Villagers, for their part, have strong charges against the teachers, from neglecting their teaching duties to playing cards during school hours.

**W**ith a population of 3,200 (including about 800 children in the 6–14 age group),

Salempur ought to have several lively and well-equipped government schools, with classes up to grade 8 at the very least. Yet Reena's school, with primary classes only, is the only government school in the village. Even this primary school is

flagrantly dysfunctional, in spite of 14 different visits by school inspectors during the twelve months preceding the survey.

And it is not that the people of Salempur are not keen on educating their children. Three private schools have sprung up in the village, and those who can afford it send their children there. But children like Reena come from very poor families. They continue to crowd the government primary school — or drop out.



metre of a primary school' (see chapter 2), yet the local government school can absorb only a small proportion of the village children. Another problem reported in several PROBE villages is that the local school, though not very far as the crow flies, is difficult to reach, particularly when it rains or (in hill areas) during the winter. There is also a residual problem of absence of primary schools in a minority of villages, mainly in remote areas. Not surprisingly, a large proportion of children in these villages have never been to school.

On the whole, however, the PROBE survey confirms that most rural households now live at a convenient distance from a primary school. The main issue, as far as school availability is concerned, is the absence of an upper-primary school in a majority (71 per cent) of villages. One reason why this is a serious problem is that, in the PROBE states, parents are often reluctant to send their daughters to school outside the village. In villages without an upper-primary school, girls often drop out after class 5, even when their parents are otherwise able and willing to continue supporting their studies. Of course, these conservative attitudes can and do change over time, but in the short term they cannot be ignored.

### DISTANT SCHOOLS

In village Doodapura of Sawai Madhopur (Rajasthan), the school is located on a separate hill. Small children find it difficult to get there. During the monsoon, the path is under water, and the school remains closed for weeks or even months at a time.

There is no school in Chaktodar (Sultanpur district, U.P.). The government school in the neighbouring village of Gyanpur has to be approached through the bazaar. This makes it unsafe for children and compounds the distance problem.

The school in Atarvan (Sidhi, M.P.) serves several villages. Most habitations are 2-3 kms away from the school.

## 4.1. Infrastructural facilities

### School availability

Salempur is a stark illustration of the inadequacy of the school infrastructure in rural India, beginning with a lack of schools. Note that all the residents of Salempur belong to the population officially counted as living 'within one kilo-

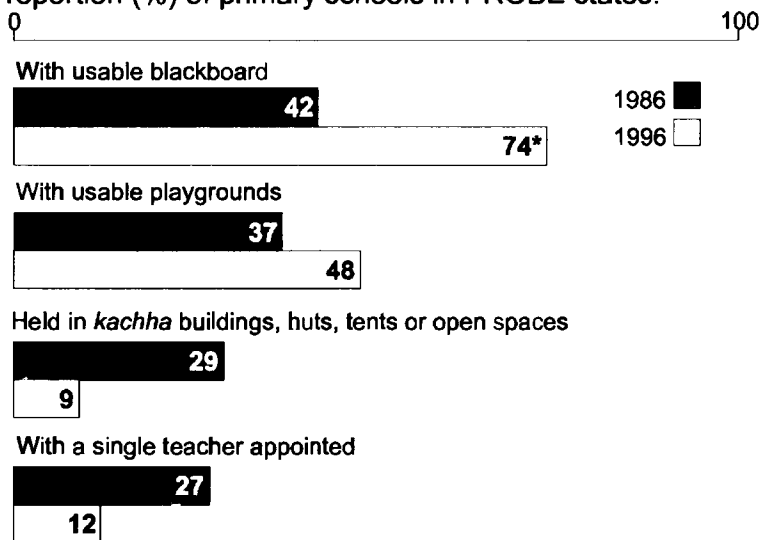
### School facilities

India's school infrastructure has significantly improved during the last ten years or so (Chart 4.1). For instance, if the Fifth All-India Educational Survey is to be believed, in 1986 less than half of all

CHART 4.1

### School Facilities are Improving

Proportion (%) of primary schools in PROBE states:



\* Usable blackboard in every classroom.

Source: Fifth All-India Educational Survey, for 1986; PROBE survey, for 1996. The comparison is indicative, as there are some methodological differences between the two surveys.

primary schools in the PROBE states had a usable blackboard. By contrast, the PROBE survey found that 74 per cent of the primary schools in the sample villages had a functional blackboard in each classroom. Similarly, the proportion of single-teacher schools in these states (taken from the same sources) has declined from 27 per cent in 1986 to 12 per cent in 1996.

The school infrastructure, however, remains highly inadequate. The current state of affairs can be assessed both against official norms as well as against the estimated requirements of universal

elementary education. Considering official norms first, the goal of Operation Blackboard (launched in 1987-8) was to ensure that all primary schools in the country have at least two *pacca* classrooms, two teachers and essential teaching-learning material such as blackboards, maps, charts and a library (for details, see p. 86). Few of the PROBE schools meet this benchmark, and in most cases the shortfall is serious. For instance, only 58 per cent of the primary schools in the sample villages had at least two *pacca* classrooms, and 12 per cent had a single teacher. Only a minority had a library (23 per cent), maps and charts (41 per cent), or any usable teaching kit (33 per cent).

The real extent of infrastructural shortage, however, emerges when we consider existing facilities against the requirements of universal elementary education. In the PROBE villages, if all the children aged 6-10 were in primary school, there would be as many as 68



### DRIPPING ROOFS... DAMAGED WALLS ...DAMPENED LEARNING

Buildings soon deteriorate when the roof leaks — as the monsoons in our country are so generous. It is not surprising that a major percentage of our school buildings need repair — leaking roofs are so common.

Leaking roofs also disrupt schooling activity. Both teachers and parents complained bitterly about the state of the school building during the monsoons, when teaching activity was often disrupted, sometimes for weeks, or even months at a time.

pupils per teacher and 113 pupils per classroom. The infrastructural shortage at the upper-primary level, taking universal elementary education as the yardstick, is even more glaring.

### ■ Main inadequacies

The inadequacies of the school infrastructure begin with the simple premises where pupils, furniture and teaching aids are to be organized. Operation Blackboard's goal of 'at least two reasonably large all weather rooms' is far from ambitious, yet it remains unrealized in a majority of schools. Out of 162 government primary schools in the PROBE villages:

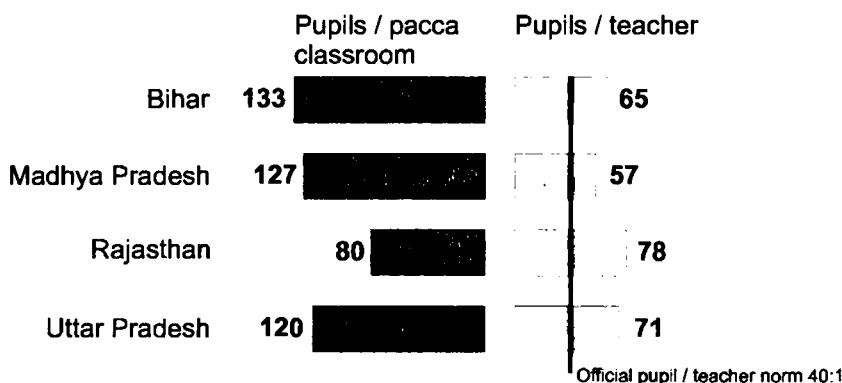
- Six do not have any building, and are held in open spaces.
- Several do not have a building of their own. Instead, they occupy rented rooms, *panchayat ghars*, *dharmshalas*, and similar premises. This is often problematic, as teaching clashes with other uses of these premises.
- Only 58 per cent had at least two *pacca* rooms.
- Sixty per cent have a leaking roof. This is a major disruption on rainy days, and sometimes prevents any classroom activity for weeks at a time during the monsoon.

CHART 4.2

### 'If All Children were at School'

If all the children aged 6-10 in the PROBE villages were in primary school, there would be:

113 pupils per *pacca* classroom  
68 pupils per appointed teacher



Source: Calculated from PROBE survey data.

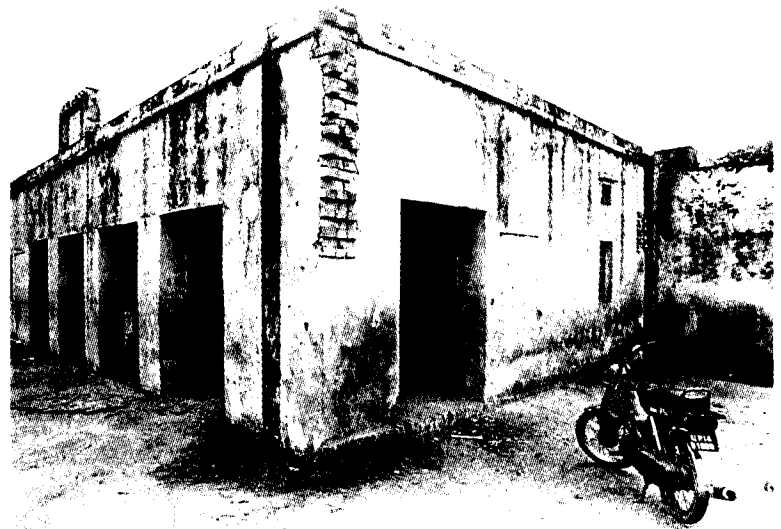
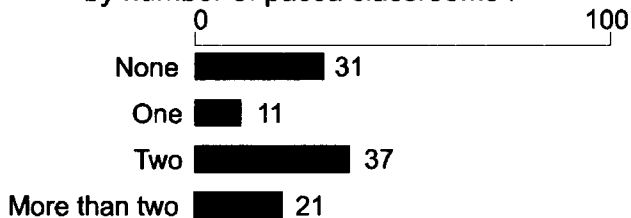


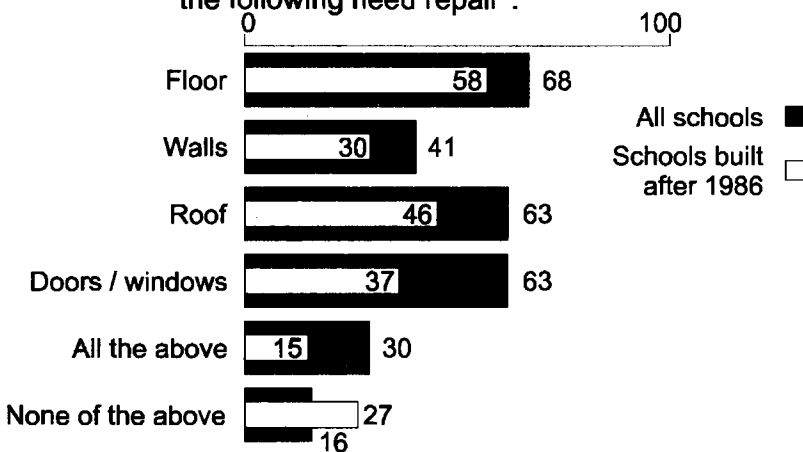
CHART 4.3

### State of School Buildings

Percentage distribution of primary schools by number of pacca classrooms :



Proportion (%) of primary schools where the following need repair\*:



\*Excluding 9 primary schools without usable building.

Source: PROBE survey

- Most are in need of major repair.
- At least 51 require a new building altogether, judging from the investigators' observations and the data on needed repairs.

One reason for this picture of dilapidation is the dismal construction standard of many schools. It is not unusual to find that, even in a relatively new school building, the flooring or roof is full of holes. Among all school buildings constructed after 1986, 46 per cent need roof repair, 58 per cent need floor repair, and 73 per cent need major repair of some kind. This is not an accident. For those in charge of construction, there is often money to be made by using sub-standard materials and taking other short-cuts. Another major cause of dilapidation is poor maintenance, on which more below.

The litany of inadequacies continues as we scrutinize basic facilities such as classrooms, blackboards, playgrounds, teachings aids and drinking water. Much debate is possible about what is essential for a primary school to function, but some minimal requirements are easy to identify. For instance, drinking water is needed if children are not to disappear when they

59 per cent of the primary schools do not have a functional water supply. Below, a more fortunate school.

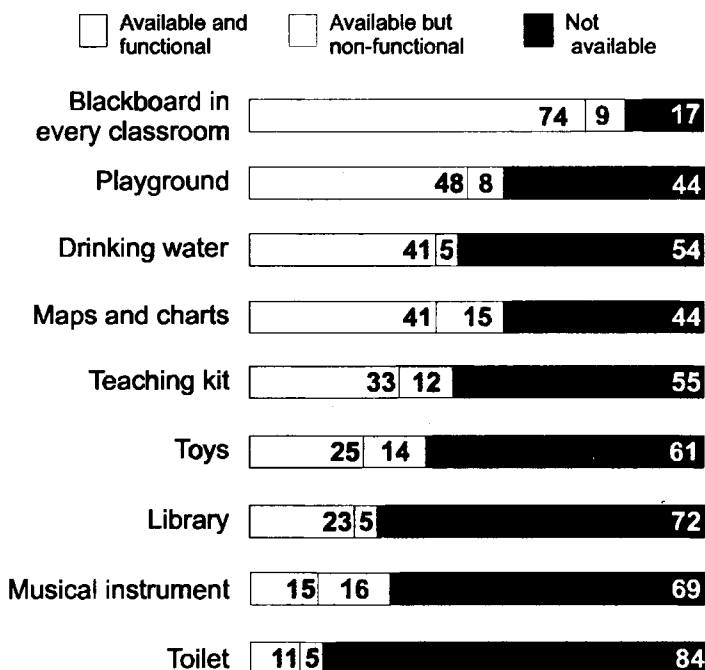
Bottom: The few toilets available were usually found locked — either non-functional or reserved for teachers.



ANAL SHAH

### CHART 4.4 School Facilities in the PROBE Villages

Proportion(%) of primary schools where the following facilities are:



Proportion (%) of schools with *none* of the above facilities: 6

Source: PROBE survey.



PRANAY

need to drink or wash (perhaps without returning to school), and if they are to learn basic hygiene. Yet, 59 per cent of the primary schools do not have a functional water supply. Similarly, toilet facilities may seem inessential in a village setting, but with the shrinking of open spaces in villages the absence of a toilet is both an inconvenience as well as a potential source of filth near the school. It is also a source of major discomfort to female teachers (see chapter 5). Alas, 89 per cent of primary schools in the PROBE villages lack a functioning toilet. As for teaching aids, there can be little dispute that they are an essential requirement of quality education. There is a drastic shortage of them in most schools. The only teaching

aid available in all schools is a stick to beat the children.

Do schools need a boundary wall? Again, debate is possible here but the PROBE survey suggests that a boundary wall helps the teachers in many ways, protects school property, and reduces disruptions by outsiders (from wandering drunkards to grazing animals). Most schools do not have one.

### ■ Maintenance and utilization

Among primary schools with a building, 79 per cent had been used for purposes other than schooling during the 12 months preceding the survey. However, the main purposes were election polls and health programmes, which have much social value; these activities also contribute to the education of children, perhaps more

so than the daily school routine. Leaving out those two activities, 30 per cent of the schools had been used for non-teaching purposes, e.g. panchayat meetings and private functions. At least five schools were used by the teachers for residential purposes (spanking new schools built with World Bank aid seem to be one of their favourite dwellings). Other cases of gross misutilization of school buildings included their prolonged use as a storage space (Sarwana in Ujjain, M.P.), a police camp (Baruhi in Bhojpur, Bihar), a place to dry cowdung cakes (Mujahidpur in Muzaffarnagar, U.P.), a cattle shed (Beiri Salehpur in Hardwar, U.P.), and even a community latrine (Kariaoti in Gwalior,

M.P.). But these are extreme cases, and on the whole the misutilization of school buildings turned out to be less common than we expected — perhaps because the available facilities are minimal.

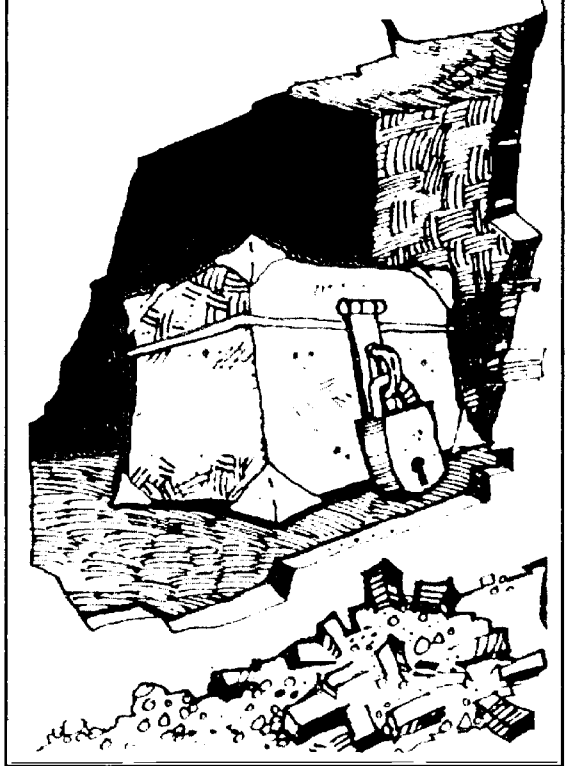
**A** more serious problem is that of poor maintenance and utilization of existing facilities. Given the scarcity of these facilities, one might have hoped that they would be well maintained and efficiently utilized. In fact, little effort is made to make the most of available resources, even in schools where there are real opportunities to create a congenial school environment. Here are some examples:

- Most school premises range from mildly unattractive to frankly repulsive. Schoolrooms are allowed to degenerate into what can be called storerooms, scarcely stimulating for the child, and the area around the school is often dirty and unpleasant. Only a few schools (notably in Rajasthan) succeeded in maintaining neat and attractive premises.

- Classrooms are in short supply, yet many classrooms remain unutilized. In schools with a good number of classrooms, it is common to see children huddled into one or two classrooms, while the other rooms are either unusable or used for storage, residence and other non-teaching purposes.

- In schools where teaching aids are available (e.g. those supplied under Operation Blackboard), a standard pattern is that these aids are locked in trunks or cupboards at a safe distance from the children. The main reason seems to be that teachers are afraid of being blamed for their loss or damage. Some of them keep the teaching aids at home, in the absence of adequate storage facilities at school or for other reasons. Also, many teachers feel unable to use these teaching aids, if only because the premises are too cramped. Only half of the teachers who had functional teaching aids reported

## TEACHING AIDS ARE LOCKED UP



using them during the seven days preceding the survey, and even that is likely to involve some over-reporting.

**T**he problem of poor utilization and maintenance has nullified many of the apparent infrastructural gains that have been made in recent years. It also makes it difficult to upgrade the school environment by providing better furniture, teaching aids, etc. Experience shows that a large proportion of these items become non-functional within a short period of time.

**M**oving beyond the physical inventory, there is a widespread failure to create a pleasant and attractive atmosphere at school with the means available. As the more enterprising schools have shown, it is possible to transform the school environment through simple devices such as keeping the premises clean, hanging colourful posters or maps on the walls, and growing flowers in the surrounding area. Initiatives of this type, however, are sorely lacking.

### SCHOOL OR STY?

Rajkiya Draupadi Kanya Prathmik Vidhyalaya in Vangaon (Saharsa district, north Bihar) is one of the few sample schools that boasts as many as four classrooms. However, these *kachcha* classrooms are close to disintegration. Six children were injured in three separate incidents when parts of the building fell down, and even now there is an acute danger of terminal collapse.

The children huddle in two rooms, on sacking brought from home. The second room is very dark. There is no teaching equipment whatsoever. The blackboards are broken and there is no chalk. Children write on their slate, or play.

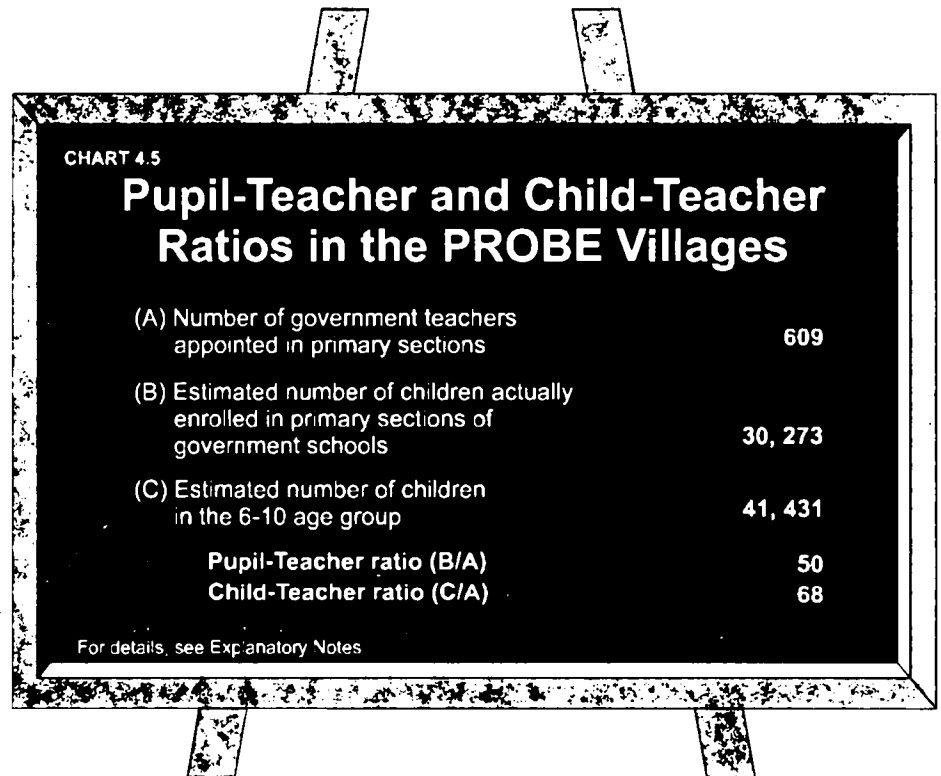
The playground is full of muck and slime. The overflowing drains could easily drown a small child. Mosquitoes are swarming. There is no toilet. Neighbours complain of children using any convenient place to relieve themselves, and teachers complain of neighbours using the playground as a toilet in the morning.

## 4.2. Teacher Resources

Turning to the human dimension of the school infrastructure, another area of concern is the scarcity of teachers and teaching time.

### Pupil-teacher ratios

Current teacher resources in rural India are way behind the official goal of universal elementary education. To appreciate this problem, consider teacher resources in the PROBE villages as a whole (Chart 4.5). The pupil-teacher ratio in government schools is defined here as the ratio of children enrolled to teachers appointed at the primary stage. Another useful notion is the child-teacher ratio, defined here as the number of children in the 6-10 age group divided by the number of government teachers in primary sections. The main difference between pupil-teacher and child-teacher ratios is that the latter includes out-of-school children. In other words, the child-teacher ratio indicates how teacher resources compare with the number of potential pupils. This makes sense, since the schooling system is



meant to be ready for universal elementary education.

As Chart 4.5 indicates, the PROBE villages have a pupil-teacher ratio of 50, and a child-teacher ratio of 68 (secondary data for the PROBE states, rural and urban

areas combined, give very similar figures: 52 and 65). Thus, if all children were at school, each teacher would face 68 pupils on average, and of course these pupils would typically belong to several different grades. Clearly, acceptable teaching standards would be very hard to maintain.

*Below: A single-teacher school. One-third of all primary schools had a single teacher present, with the teacher sometimes handling over a hundred pupils.*



ANAL SHAH

This problem of high average child-teacher and pupil-teacher ratios is compounded by a highly uneven distribution of teachers between different schools and villages. In principle, teaching posts are sanctioned on the basis of actual enrolment, but the official norms are not strictly followed in practice. Also, teaching posts are often vacant in the less attractive locations, further enhancing the variation in pupil-teacher ratios between different villages. In the PROBE villages, the pupil-teacher ratio at the primary stage varies between 9 and 172! And out of 162 government primary schools, 26 have a pupil-teacher ratio above 75.

### Single teachers

The problem of teacher shortage culminates in single-teacher schools. These have been officially abolished, but remain quite widespread in practice: 12 per cent of all primary schools in the PROBE

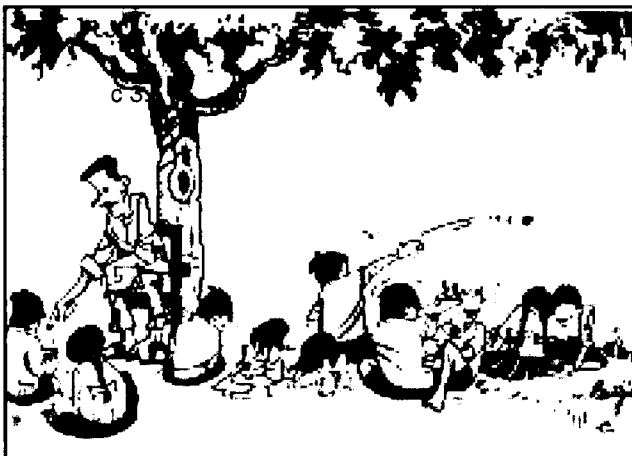
villages had a single teacher appointed. Another 21 per cent had a single teacher present at the time of the survey. Thus, one-third of the primary schools surveyed (53 schools in all) were *de facto* single-teacher schools on that day. Of these 53 schools, 45 had more than 50 children enrolled, and about half had more than 50 children present on the day of the survey.

**W**hen a single teacher handles all five classes together, sometimes with over a hundred pupils, how does he or she manage the unmanageable? There are many ways...

1. One class at a time: At Sotava (Morena, M.P.), the 22-year old *shiksha karmi* (para-teacher) had to tackle all of 146 pupils enrolled. He had neither pre-service nor in-service training. His method was to teach one class at a time and leave the rest to their own devices. This is also the method employed by the teacher in Mujahidpur (Muzaffarnagar, U.P.). She was teaching only class 3 when the PROBE investigators arrived.

2. Multi-grade teaching: The teacher at Chapiya Bujurg (Siwan, Bihar) taught two classes at a time, with stick in hand. The others were in a separate classroom, chatting.

3. Peer teaching: The teacher at Syuda (Nainital district, U.P.) was happy with his own method. He had grouped the children so that the older children would help the younger ones. Class 1 sat with class 4 and class 2 with class 5. As no child actually knew much, this did not exactly resolve the problem.



## 'AKELE HAIN, YE BACCHON KO DEKHEN YA PADAVE?'

*'Akele hain, ye bacchon ko dekhlen ya padave* (he's all alone, should he look after the children or should he teach)', comments a parent sympathetically. The 'headmaster' of the village primary school in Paraspur (Bahraich, U.P.) is the sole teacher in a school with 157 children enrolled.

When we reach, the teacher is in his *banyan* doing some record-keeping work. The children (about one-third of them are present) look very dirty. A few have their books open; a few more are writing on their slates. Most are simply talking to each other or passing time.

There are no teaching aids whatsoever. Just outside the school building are piles of rubbish and a large pool of muddy water. Buffaloes have been tethered there and a few animals are grazing.

The teacher, according to parents, is not prone to stay for long. Who would blame him for deserting this hopeless environment?

4. All together, now: At Sundarpur (Allahabad, U.P.), 135 children had been ranged neatly in lines by the teacher. The teacher at Keshavpur (Gazipur, U.P.) had given written work to keep the children busy.

5. The opting-out option: Unfortunately, this was the most common option. At village Kodri in Bahraich (U.P.), the teacher gazed into the distance while the children chatted inside the classroom. In 30 of the 53 schools with a single teacher present, there was absolutely no teaching activity going on.

**C**learly, teaching-learning activity is minimal when a single teacher has to deal with disparate age groups and a large number of pupils. The casualties include not only the children's learning achievements but also the teacher's morale and the work culture. These problems also apply, to varying degrees, in multi-teacher schools: more than 70 per cent of teachers in these schools practise 'multi-grade teaching', i.e. teach several classes simultaneously. Very few schools have one teacher for each grade.

*'Parents are not interested in sending kids to single-teacher schools as they know that a child won't learn anything anyway.'*

*A teacher in Rojbas (Ujjain, M.P.).*

## ■ Effective teaching time

**T**he problem of teacher shortage is magnified by short hours of work. To start with, the average government school in the PROBE villages is closed for about 12 weeks each year on account of annual vacations, and for another 60 days during the remaining 40 weeks on account of Sundays and Saturdays (when most schools have half-day timings). That leaves 220 days of potential teacher attendance, out of which 20 days or so have to be deducted for other holidays and permitted leave; another 20 days or so for closure of the school during heavy rains; another 12 days or so for 'non-teaching duties' such as census- and election-related assignments; about 9 days (one day a month) for collection of salary; and another 9 days or so for collection and distribution of incentives such as food rations and free textbooks. If anything, this deduction formula is conservative (e.g. it ignores other common diversions such



as administrative tasks, in-service training and strikes), yet we are already down to 150 days per year. Various cross-checks based on PROBE data suggest that this is indeed a reasonable benchmark. Note also that so far our representative teacher is not deviating from the bounds of duty.

On each of these 150 days, a teacher is supposed to spend about 6 hours at school. But arriving late and leaving early is accepted practice in most schools, and casual absenteeism (known to some as 'gota leave') is also common. Another common pattern is for the school to fail to

reconvene after the lunch break. Judging from parental testimonies, first-hand observations and the survey data, an average teacher spends something like 4 hours at school on an average working day.

Finally, we have to consider what our representative teacher is actually doing during those four hours. This issue is discussed in the next section. For the time being, we note that the PROBE investigators found at most half of the teachers engaged in any kind of teaching activity when they reached the sample schools. This further reduces the effective teaching time to *2 hours a day, for 150 days in the year*. When this is divided among 50 children, it amounts to roughly one minute of individual teaching attention per pupil per day over the whole year.

Here again, we are looking at average figures, and given the high variability of teacher resources and practices between different schools, many schools fall far short of these benchmarks. An extreme case of low teaching input arises when the teacher turns up once in a while for various formalities, as has been observed in several villages. In Surothi (Dholpur, Rajasthan), for instance, some teachers come late (up to 1 p.m.), others come once a week or so, others not at all. And in Bisariya (Ranchi district, Bihar), the headmaster is not seen for weeks at a time; parents have appointed a retired teacher to replace him, on a salary of Rs 300 per month. Without going to these extremes, many teachers indulge in various degrees of sustained absenteeism. In two-teacher schools, for instance, it is not uncommon for teachers to take turns in attending. And in one-third of all the schools covered by the PROBE survey, the headmaster was absent at the time of the investigators' visit.

## PUPIL ACHIEVEMENTS AND SCHOOL QUALITY

Factors influencing pupil achievements can broadly be classified into school-related and household-related. Early studies of the determinants of pupil achievements in developed countries suggested that school-related factors (e.g. the pupil-teacher ratio) were not significant in explaining variations in pupil achievements. Household-related factors were found to be far more important. However, more recent studies based on improved statistical methods conclude that school-related factors too have a strong influence on pupil achievements.

For developing countries, the importance of school-related factors is well-established. The Indian evidence, especially recent studies initiated under the District Primary Education Programme, indicates that pupil achievements reflect both family background (e.g. household and parental education) and school characteristics. The critical school characteristics include infrastructural facilities, teacher attributes and the teaching-learning process.

*School facilities:* The positive association between school facilities and pupil achievements is stronger in the educationally-backward states (e.g. Madhya Pradesh and Orissa). It is not significant in Kerala, and weak in other educationally-advanced states. The pupil-teacher ratio also matters: pupil achievements drop if it exceeds 50.

*Teacher attributes:* These have a variable influence on pupil achievements. Teacher qualification and training have a positive and statistically significant effect on pupil achievements in some states, but not in others.

*Teaching-learning process:* Pupil achievements are significantly influenced by the teaching-learning process. In many states, regularity of class-work and home-work is positively associated with pupil achievements. Other significant variables are the frequency of tests, and parental involvement: pupil achievements are higher in schools with an active parent-teacher association (PTA).

Do private schools perform better than government schools? The empirical evidence on this issue is not conclusive. For instance, studies in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have shown that private-unaided schools perform better than government schools or private-aided schools. A study on Tamil Nadu shows that private-aided schools perform better than unaided schools. A study on Kerala finds no significant difference between private-aided and government schools in terms of the level of pupil achievements. Many a time, what looks like a private school advantage actually reflects the socio-economic background of the pupils, or the fact that private schools select brighter pupils through admission tests.

To conclude, the Indian evidence shows that school quality matters a great deal to pupil achievements. Schools with better internal management perform better. So do schools with more regular class-work and home-work. An active PTA also enhances the functioning of a school. Improving school quality is an important means of raising pupil achievements.

*N.V. Varghese.*

## 4.3. Activity Patterns

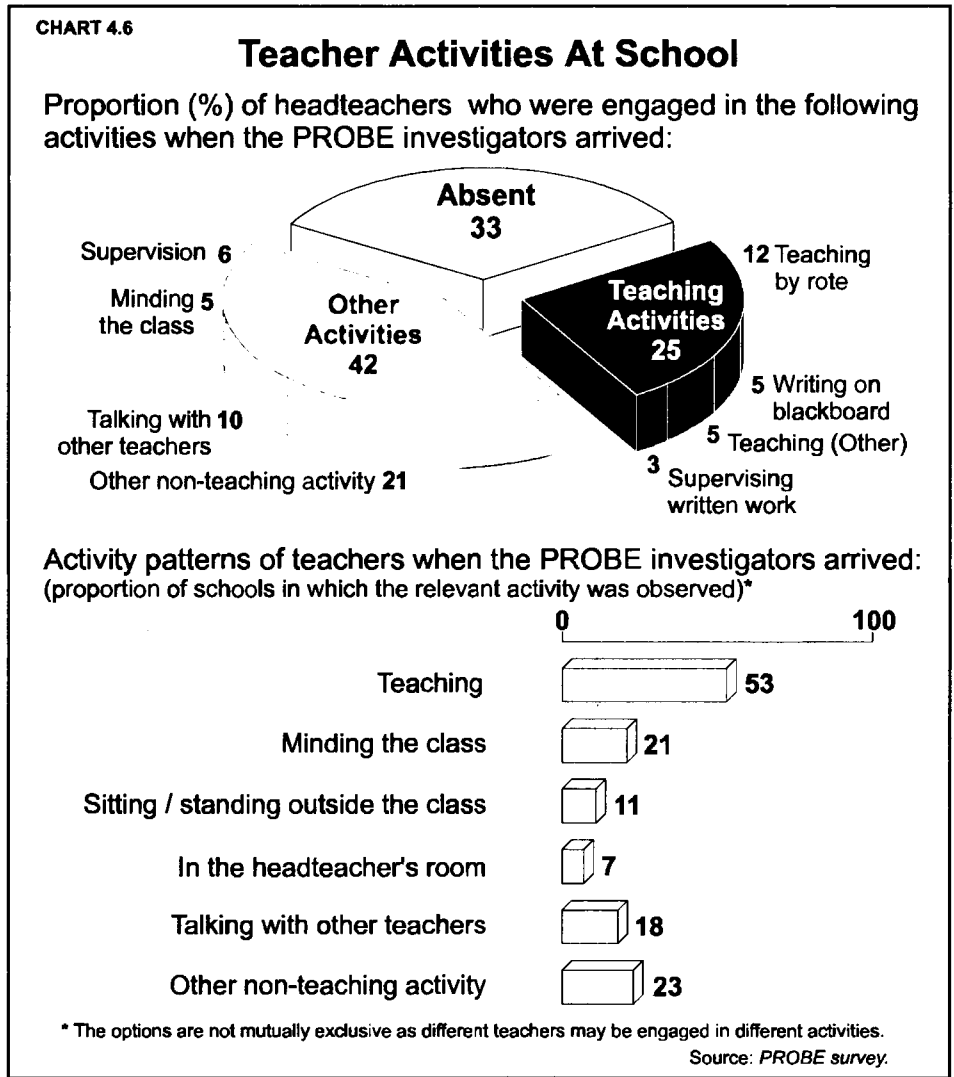
### Activity levels

One of the objectives of the PROBE survey was to learn something about

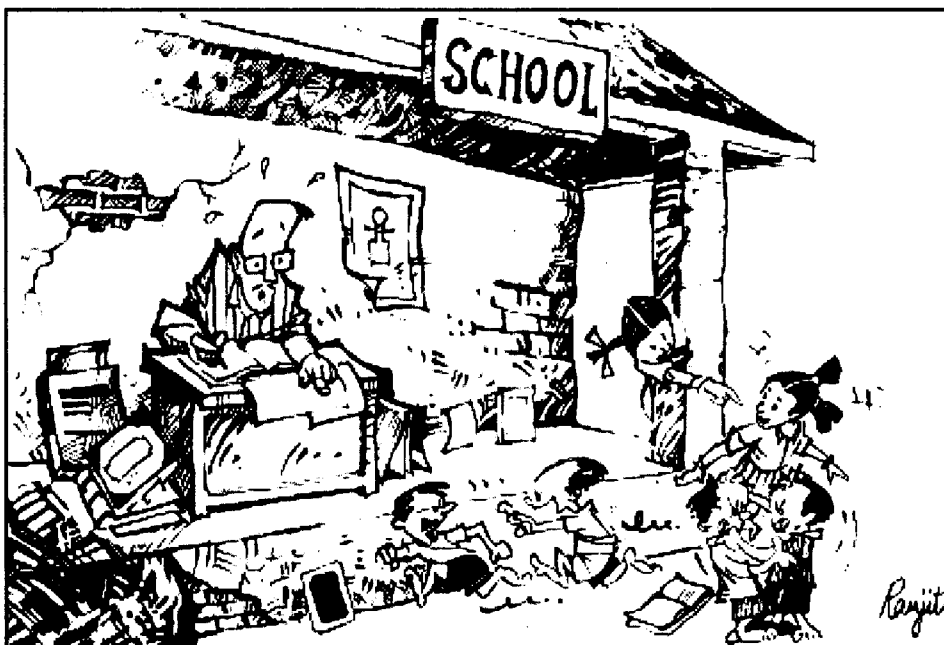
classroom processes (on which more in chapter 6). Hence, the visits to the sample schools were always unannounced, and investigators were asked to take down detailed notes about activity patterns at the time of their arrival: where the children of different classes were sitting, how they kept themselves busy, what teachers were doing, who else was around, and so on.

These notes reveal what we see as the fundamental flaw of the schooling system as things stand: a low level of teaching activity. To begin with, in close to half of the schools visited, there was no teaching activity at all when the investigators arrived. Even that is an understatement of the problem, for three reasons. First, schools that were closed on the day of the survey are not taken into account here. Second, the investigators' visits usually took place late in the morning, a time of peak school activity. Third, the term 'teaching activity' is understood here in a very broad sense, which includes relatively passive methods such as asking children to read aloud or supervising written exercises.

In schools with a single teacher present (one-third of the primary schools surveyed), lack of teaching activity is almost inevitable. The teacher's priority, in such situations, is to keep a semblance of order and avoid trouble. Among 53 schools in



Below : Paperwork — a common 'non-teaching' activity during school hours.



this category, 30 had no teaching activity at all. Even in the other 23 schools, teaching activity was minimal.

Among multi-teacher schools, about half had at least one teacher engaged in some kind of teaching activity at the time of the investigators' visit. Other teachers were found occupied with a whole range of non-teaching activities, some loosely related to school duties (e.g. filling registers and keeping an eye on the pupils), others more in the nature of pastimes (e.g. reading or gossiping). Liberal time-use patterns are in danger of becoming accepted norms in the teaching profession.

### ■ Nature of activity

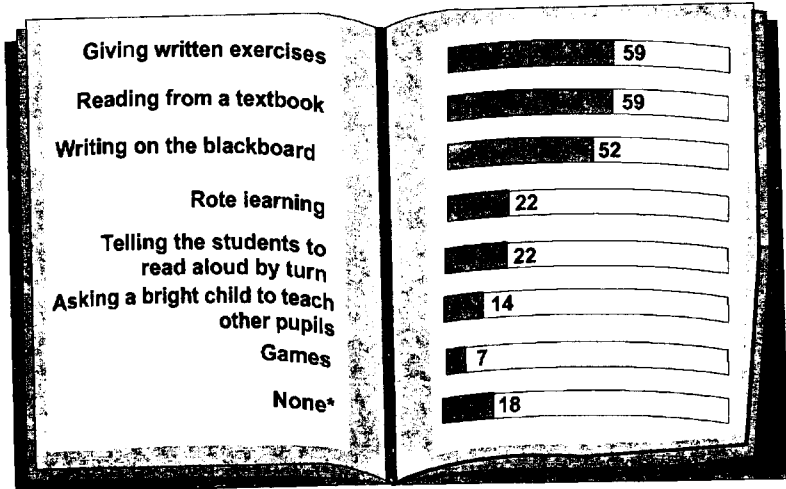
The PROBE survey involved asking class-1 teachers about the teaching methods they had used that morning.

Below : This is a page from eight-year old Maya's mathematics notebook. Clearly she is unable to form digits correctly after three years of schooling. Her other notebook is full of incomprehensible scribbles. The notebooks of many of her classmates at Golwa primary school (Ujjain, M.P.) are no better. Maya is the eldest of five siblings in a very poor family, and her parents are making desperate efforts to keep her in school. They are dismayed with Maya's lack of progress.

CHART 4.7

### Reported Teaching Methods

Proportion (%) of class - 1 teachers who stated that they had used the following teaching methods on the morning of the survey:



\* Teacher was unable to take up any teaching activity.

Source: PROBE survey.

संख्याक लिपि	शब्दांश	वर्णमाला	संख्याक लिपि
श्रीगुरु		श्रीगुरु	
श्रीगुरु		श्रीगुरु	
श्रीगुरु		श्रीगुरु	
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One-fifth of them were unable to respond as they had not begun teaching (even though the school visits took place late in the morning). About half said that they had used the blackboard. However, investigators' observations indicate that written exercises are the predominant teaching method. Written exercises usually meant copying from the blackboard, or from textbooks, and in some cases from guide books (*kunji*). Inspection of the children's notebooks revealed that exercises are at best casually checked. Some of the notebooks were filled with meaningless scribbles.

Another alarming pattern is that class-1 children tend to be systematically neglected. This can take the form of keeping them idle, leaving them to their own devices, expecting them to learn from their peers, or lumping them with higher classes. When teachers are unable or unwilling to teach all the children, they typically concentrate their efforts on the older children. One reason for this is that teaching young children is more demanding. Another reason, where school examinations are taken seriously, is that teachers are keen that class-5 children should get good results.

## EDUCATIONAL BACKWARDNESS IN MEWAT

'Two hours to the middle ages' would be a fitting sign on the road from Delhi to Mewat. That is all it takes on this road from the capital of India to reach a place where the social environment takes us centuries back in history.

Mewat (Gurgaon, Haryana) is inhabited chiefly by the Meos, a community of recent Muslim converts who used to be Rajput Hindus. Many retain their Hindu caste names, and celebrate both Muslim and Hindu festivals. The women do not observe purdah. The Meos are very poor, depending as they do on small rain-fed farms supplemented by animal husbandry.

The Meos today are among the most disadvantaged communities in India. Take any development indicator and you will find them at the bottom. Female literacy, for example, is 1.8 per cent — the lowest in the country. The average household size is 9.5, and the infant mortality rate is as high as 85 per thousand. The female-male ratio is 884 per thousand as against the national average of 927.

Though many factors contribute to this situation, the persistent backwardness of Mewat has much to do with its abysmal lack of education. Yet this lack of education is due neither to the lack of schools nor to the indifference of the community towards education. Mewat remains backward because of the apathy of government officials and the lack of accountability in all schools.

The Meos want schools that function, and are properly equipped. Instead one finds broken chairs, peeling plaster, broken window panes and no toilets or drinking water. The schools are usually empty, with a few idling teachers who tell you that students do not come to school because the Meos do not value education. The villagers tell a different story: teachers arrive at 10.30 or 11.30 a.m. for classes that are supposed to begin at 7.30 a.m. Children come to school, play for a while, and then go away. Parents do not want children to idle around. Nor do they want their daughters to go to schools where teachers are absent, and where they have to relieve themselves in the open for lack of toilets. Though initial enrolment is high, retention rates after the lower primary level are low. About 85 per cent of girls are withdrawn after the lower primary level.

Schools should be sensitive to the wishes of the community. Meos would like Urdu, their mother tongue, to be taught at school though they do not mind Hindi as the medium of instruction. This is ignored. Similarly, Meo parents are averse to sending their girls to coeducational schools, or to schools outside the village. This concern is not addressed either.

That Meos are keen on education is evident from the far better retention rate found in the few private schools. A girls' school established by a young Muslim sarpanch with community help has 200 students. The teachers, mainly Hindu women from the neighbouring villages (often wives of government officials), are paid far less than teachers in government schools but they teach more conscientiously. The success of this school shows that parents will send their daughters to school if the conditions are right. Unfortunately, most Meos cannot afford the schools in which the conditions are right. Schools run through voluntary effort have to struggle endlessly for resources and official recognition.

Mewat is generally regarded as a lost cause. We did not find it to be so. On the contrary, we saw much reason for hope which lay primarily in education as well as in a process of building the community's confidence and its ability to fight against apathy and corruption in the administration. On paper, there is no lack of funds or development schemes for Mewat.

*Zarina Bhatti.*

Very few schools had any activity in the nature of organized play (though children often improvised play to kill time). Some teachers, especially those who had participated in recent training programmes, were able to describe play-based teaching methods such as 'joyful learning', but did not seem to consider it possible to apply these methods in the classroom. In one school, children were listening spellbound to the story of the hare and the tortoise. One teacher was found teaching from a map, and another had organized games during the lunch break. But these were small candles in a dark landscape of minimal or nominal teaching activity.

## 4.4. Social discrimination

### How discrimination operates

In most of this chapter and the preceding one, we have highlighted the general problems of schooling in rural India, without reference to specific sections of the population. Many of these problems, however, are vastly greater for those who are disadvantaged in terms of class, caste or gender.

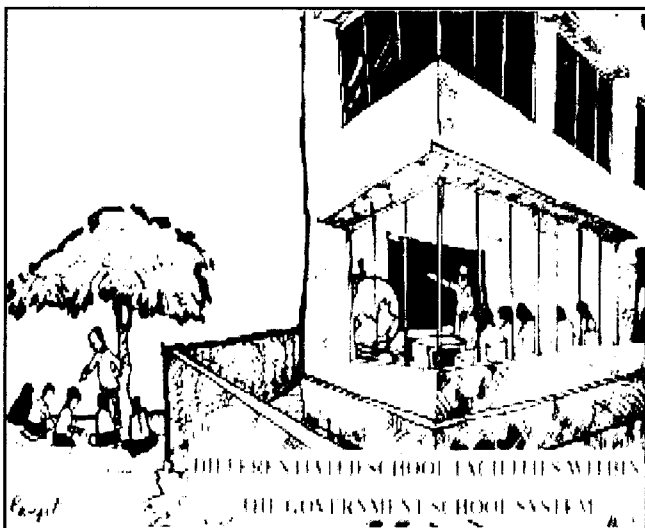
In some respects this is obvious. Most of the hurdles identified in the last chapter, for instance, are likely to be harder to overcome in poor households: poor parents have less money to pay for schooling, a greater need for child labour, less scope to create a learning environment at home, greater difficulty in establishing a rapport with the teachers, and so on. Similarly, girls are the main victims of the absence of an upper-primary school in a majority of villages.

What is less obvious is that the schooling system itself does not give equal treatment to different sections of the population. Discrimination against underprivileged groups is endemic, in several forms.

**F**irst, a system of multiple tracks has developed, whereby different types of schooling opportunities are accessible to different sections of the population. One aspect of this is the basic dualism between government schools and private schools (on the latter, see chapter 8). Private schools tend to be better managed, more expensive, and oriented to privileged families. In some villages (e.g. Kota Shivpratap Singh in Mirzapur, U.P.), a peculiar form of social apartheid has developed, whereby most dalit children go to the government school while most high-caste children attend private schools. Another aspect of this multiple-track pattern is the dualism between 'formal' and 'informal' schooling facilities. The latter, consisting of various low-cost schooling arrangements, tend to be concentrated in deprived areas. While these facilities can be a valuable supplement to formal schools in these areas (e.g. to provide some instruction to drop-out children), they often end up as second-rate substitutes for real schools.

**S**econd, there are differentiated facilities even within the government schooling system. The infrastructure of a government school (e.g. number of teachers, quality of building, range of teaching aids) tends to be far better in privileged areas than in deprived villages. In Madhya Pradesh, for instance, the proportion of

*Government schools, are of different standards, with children in deprived areas getting poorer facilities.*



## WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A DALIT CHILD IN SCHOOL TODAY?

What does it really mean to be a dalit child in school today? Is social opposition to dalit schooling an aberration of the past? In the absence of systematic research we do not have definite answers to these questions. Still, available studies provide clear evidence that schooling can be quite a traumatic experience for a dalit child.

School textbooks are, by and large, silent about the dalit experience of social oppression. A study of textbooks for classes 4, 5 and 6 of government schools in Madhya Pradesh, for example, shows that not a single character can be identified as coming from a scheduled-caste background. Yet a large proportion of students in these schools are from erstwhile untouchable communities.

Dalit students, however, find the silence about dalit experience in the official school curriculum less threatening than the power of the 'hidden' curriculum of norms, values, attitudes and expectations. Some dalit students who went to school just three decades ago quoted several examples of blatant discrimination, including being made to sit or eat separately. Eighty per cent of the 1,030 dalit students at a college in Aurangabad said they were made to sit outside the classroom in primary school. In another study, a Harijan schoolteacher from Azamgarh painfully recalls his school days: 'We were asked to sit separately. Our copy or slates were not touched by the teachers.'

There are still other forms of discrimination which are less tangible but equally damaging. Teacher behaviour is one important source of humiliation. Upper-caste teachers have low expectations of dalit pupils, and often consider them as 'dull' and 'ineducable'. A significant proportion of scheduled-caste professionals recall being made to feel 'unintelligent' and 'inferior' by their teachers, and also feeling 'ignored' by them. Interpersonal relationships among students are also a problem. An ICSSR study conducted in the seventies concludes that 'at least as far as Scheduled Castes are concerned, schools and college have not functioned effectively as melting pots for caste boundaries in the matter of friendships'.

The adverse learning environment experienced by scheduled-caste pupils cannot but affect their educational aspirations and achievements. The high drop-out rate among scheduled-caste students has to be read in this light.

*Geetha Nambissan.*

schools with a pacca building ranges from 88 per cent in Indore (a prosperous district) to 2 per cent in Bastar (a tribal district). Even in Delhi, the quality of government schools varies a great deal over short distances, depending on the social composition of the neighbourhood.

**T**hird, even within the same school, children of different social back-

grounds often receive unequal treatment. This includes some blatant forms of discrimination, which are supposed to belong to history. We found a few schools, for instance, where dalit children had to sit separately from other children (e.g. in village Dubarkalan, Mirzapur), or where children of some castes sat on benches while others sat on the floor. We also found villages with two adjacent government schools, used by different castes. Far more widespread than these cases of blatant discrimination, however, are subtle forms of unequal treatment in the classroom.

## ■ Classroom prejudices

One common example of social prejudice in the classroom is the disparaging attitude of upper-caste teachers towards dalit children. This can take various forms, such as telling dalit children that they are 'stupid', making them feel inferior, using them for menial chores, and giving them liberal physical punishment. Harassment from upper-caste pupils is another common experience of dalit children. Class-based discrimination follows similar patterns. In one school, the investigator noted that new textbooks had been distributed to children from affluent families, while poor children were given old textbooks recycled from previous years. Aside from affecting classroom

### GENDER BIAS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL TEXT-BOOKS

The National Policy on Education (1986) urges the elimination of 'sex stereotyping' in the school curriculum. To find out how far this recommendation has been taken on board in practice, we scrutinized a class-3 Hindi textbook (*Gyan Bharti*) used in Uttar Pradesh. The textbook's illustrations include 49 pictures of men or boys. These include a scientist, a soldier, two doctors, a teacher, kings and poets. By contrast, only 14 women (or girls) are represented. Almost invariably, they are shown in subordinate positions or standard 'female' roles: a girl is tying *rakhi* to her brother, two women are fanning a king, two other women are fighting over the custody of an infant, two nurses are assisting doctors, and one woman sits in front of a large plate of food. The textbook does not include a single picture of a woman who could be an innovative role model for school children. Clearly, primary-school textbooks continue to endorse prevailing stereotypes about the role of women in society.

Nidhi Mehrotra.

interaction, social prejudices and discrimination also stand in the way of a co-operative rapport between parents and teachers (more on this in the next chapter).

Here again, the problem is not confined to rural areas, and it is disturbing to find that caste prejudices die hard even in a 'modern' setting. A recent study highlights continuing caste discrimination in the heart of Delhi, where some teachers go so far as to criticize the accessibility of government schools to dalit children. As one of them bluntly put it: '*Scheduled-caste bacchon ko padha ke kya faida hai, unko band baja sikha do... bas utna hi thik hai.* (What is the point of teaching scheduled-caste children? Let them learn how to beat drums, that's good enough.)'

Aside from being the victims of explicit discrimination, underprivileged children also suffer from the fact that teachers tend to concentrate their efforts on the higher grades (e.g. classes 4 and 5 in a primary school), as well as on the children whom they consider to have more potential. These favoured pupils, more often than not, come from families that are better able to provide a learning environment at home.

*'The teachers only teach upper-caste children. They use our children to do odd jobs in the school. They don't teach them anything. Padhai sabke liye barabar honi chahiye (all pupils should be taught equally).'*

*Ramsree, a Jatav mother in Surothi (Dholpur, Rajasthan).*

*In Mukhadi Khadi (Sidhi, M.P.), a tribal village, there is no school. Some children attend the government school in nearby Atarwan, but their parents have bitter complaints about how they are treated. Says one respondent: 'Our boy goes to school, but does not learn anything. The teacher is upper-caste; if he was from our community, he would teach. Unko milna hi sambhav nahin (even meeting him is impossible).'*

## ■ Gender bias

Gender bias is another aspect of social discrimination in the classroom. For instance, boys often receive more attention than girls from the teacher. Interviews with teachers confirm the resilient influence of gender stereotypes, including a dim view of the abilities and potential of female children. Interestingly, teacher perceptions of female children were more positive in Himachal Pradesh, where gender relations tend to be less unequal than elsewhere in north India (see chart 9.4).

Another major source of gender bias in the classroom is the sexist content of the curriculum. Despite the official resolve to 'eliminate sex stereotyping' and even to achieve 'a well conceived edge in favour of women' (National Policy on Education, 1986), the school curriculum continues to project a highly conservative view of the role of women in society. The absence of female teachers in many schools reinforces the male-dominated nature of the school environment. In these and other ways, gender bias in the classroom compounds the problem of unequal treatment between boys and girls in the family.

## ■ 4.5. Concluding Remark

In this chapter, we have examined four essential aspects of the school environment: the physical infrastructure, teacher resources, activity patterns, and social discrimination. On each count, there is a deep failure to create conditions favourable to quality education. Aside from stifling the growth of the child (see chart overleaf), the unappealing nature of the school environment fuels the 'discouragement effect' discussed in chapter 3. It also has a disempowering effect on teachers.



ANAL SHAH

*'We are not important and neither is education.'*

### AN OPPRESSIVE ENVIRONMENT: HOW CAN A CHILD GROW?

#### Experience

school building is usually bare, often dilapidated, even filthy

teacher shortage; overcrowded classes; class 1 usually neglected

teaching activity is of short duration; teachers arrive late and leave early; when present they may not teach

no teaching aids used; alien curriculum; child may not even have a textbook

copying and cramming are the most common teaching methods

no craftwork or colour or music; physical activity is rare

gender bias; quiet discrimination against children of disadvantaged background

#### Effect

going to school is neither attractive nor stimulating to the child

children play or fight among themselves; puzzled and bored and switched out, particularly the younger ones

spoils chances of success especially for first-generation learners; child's self-esteem hurt: 'I am not important and neither is learning'

child repeatedly experiences the burden of non-comprehension, and with it a sense of failure

no stimulation for a thinking mind to develop or for self-confidence to grow

boredom; schooling is not invigorating for the child

further marginalization of underprivileged children

# 5

## CHAPTER FIVE

# teachers and society



### 5.1. Introduction

Deep inside the bear-infested forests of Gumla district in south Bihar is a hamlet called Baser. Tucked on a low hill, it has only 50 families or so, most of them *adivasis*. To the visitor, Baser looks lovely beyond singing, but staying there takes courage. Aside from the terror unleashed by the bears, life in Baser is frugal and public amenities are minimal.

The hamlet has a small primary school with a single teacher, a young adivasi by the name of Sem. When he came to Baser

eight years ago, the school only had five or six pupils, and was held under a tree. Now most of the young children go to school. The improvement owes a great deal to Sem, who patiently built a rapport with the parents and convinced them to send their children to school. He is a committed teacher, and the school has a lively — even happy — feel. When we visited it, the children were listening intently as Sem explained something to them using the blackboard. Sem taught in Hindi, but he was also able to communicate with the children in their own language (Mundari), which he learnt soon



after coming to Baser. The school building was neat and tidy, with well-maintained furniture and teaching aids. Sem's efforts have been actively supported by the village education committee.

This heartening story points to several interesting lessons, all supported by the PROBE survey: the potential hardships of teacher postings in remote areas, the viability of a formal school even in a relatively small hamlet, the importance of language issues in adivasi areas, and the transforming effects of mutual support between parents and teachers, among others. Above all, this real-life example gives a sense of possibility, and highlights the crucial role of the *teacher* in fulfilling the potential of a village school. If any single factor can make the difference between a poor school and a successful school, it is the commitment and initiative of the teacher.

Unfortunately, Sem's story is quite exceptional in this respect. 'If only teachers would teach properly' is the desperate refrain heard from countless parents in

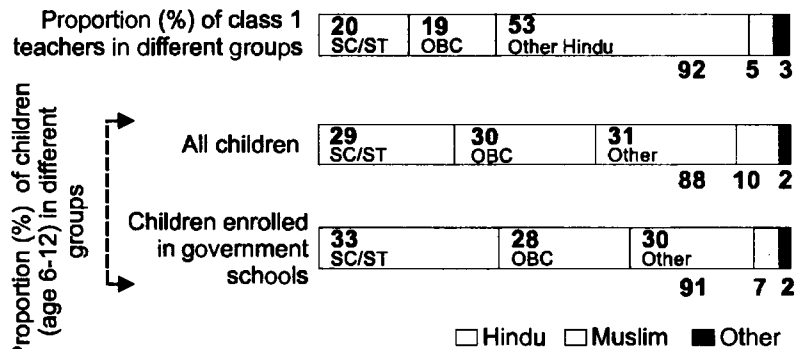
*Below: A primary-school teacher in a PROBE village. The teaching profession continues to be heavily male-dominated in rural areas.*



ANIL SHAH

CHART 5.1

## Social Background of Teachers and Students (PROBE villages)



Source: PROBE survey.

the PROBE states. This widespread problem of teacher inertia has two inter-related roots. First, teachers work in a *demotivating environment*, which saps their morale day after day. Second, there is a deep *lack of accountability* in the schooling system. This chapter explores how this situation has come about, as well as the general predicament of teachers.

## 5.2. Village Teachers – Background and Orientation

The PROBE survey included a detailed interview with one teacher in each school. Whoever taught class 1 was selected for interview, and if he or she was absent, teachers of other successively higher classes were sought. The selected teacher was asked a range of questions about his or her background, training, experience, perceptions, aspirations, complaints, and so on. Unless stated otherwise, the data presented in this chapter are based on these interviews. Note also that this chapter focuses on teachers in *government* schools; private schools are discussed in chapter 8.

### Social background

The social background of teachers is more diverse today than it used to be in the past. The traditional *gurujis* used to

belong to the higher castes, and women were by and large excluded from the profession. Today, individuals of very diverse background (including a significant proportion of women) are found in the teaching profession. This is a welcome development, which partly reflects official efforts to appoint more female teachers as well as persons from disadvantaged castes.

Yet, within the rural society, teachers remain relatively privileged in terms of class, caste and gender. Taking class first, government teachers almost inevitably belong to the more affluent sections of the rural society, by virtue of their relatively high salaries and favourable terms of employment. Even in terms of economic status *prior* to getting a job, it is very likely that most teachers come from economically privileged families.

Further information on the social background of teachers is presented in Chart 5.1. Over half of the teachers interviewed belonged to Hindu communities outside the SC/ST (Scheduled Castes / Scheduled Tribes) and OBC (Other Backward Castes) categories, with each of the latter two accounting for about 20 per cent of all the teachers. In other words, the upper castes are over-represented among teachers, while other communities are under-represented. The gender bias is even sharper: among all the teachers appointed in primary sections (not just those who were interviewed), only 21 per

cent were female. The proportion of women among head teachers in primary schools was even lower — below 10 per cent. About 60 per cent of the schools did not have a single female teacher. To put these figures in perspective, note that the proportion of women among primary-school teachers is about two-thirds in Kerala and above 80 per cent in Sri Lanka.

There is some evidence of a continuing trend towards a more balanced composition of the teaching profession, but the pace of change is slow. The caste bias is narrowing somewhat over time, mainly reflecting job reservation for SC/ST candidates. Several states are making efforts to appoint more female teachers, but posting female teachers in rural areas

poses various difficulties, especially in north India's highly patriarchal environment (see section 5.3). The teaching profession, therefore, continues to be heavily male-dominated, at least in rural areas. The class bias, if anything, has probably grown over time, considering the high rate of growth of teacher salaries.

## IS THERE A CASE FOR FEMALE TEACHERS?

*'Female teachers pay more attention to children and teach with greater responsibility.'*  
A parent in Barun (Rohtas, Bihar).

*'Female teachers are irregular because of difficult working conditions in remote areas, particularly the inconvenience of commuting every day.'*  
A parent from Devpura, (Mathura, U.P.)

Not far from Baser is another remote village called Mayamsaur. It has a small school with a single teacher and 69 pupils. The teacher, a young adivasi woman called Anjah, is serious and well-organized; the children waste no time at school. After noting that 'the teacher handles this difficult situation in a very impressive manner', the investigator who visited this school added: 'She walks every day on her own from Kaoli — about 45 minutes each way through the forest; she is the first teacher who served me a glass of water herself, without asking the children to do it; and she is the first teacher to claim that she often leaves the school well after the official closing time, e.g. because the premises need tidying up.' Half of the pupils are girls, an unusually high ratio.

Like Sem, Anjali has unusual courage and dedication. Also unusual is to find a female teacher posted in a remote village, that too on her own. In general, female teachers are not only few in number, but also heavily concentrated in the larger or more accessible villages.

Does this lack of female teachers matter? The short answer is 'yes', but the reasons may be a little more subtle than is generally assumed. For instance, we found little support for the naive view that female teachers are far more conscientious than their male colleagues. Nor did parents express a clear preference for female teachers. They were far more concerned with the quality of teaching than with the gender of the teacher, and saw little relation between the two. Some were frankly sceptical of female teachers, claiming for instance that they wasted much time gossiping or knitting.

Yet there are strong arguments in favour of female teachers:

- Both male and female teachers felt that *young children are more comfortable with a female teacher.*

- In some areas, female teachers are likely to have a *positive effect on female enrolment*, as seems to be happening in Mayamsaur. In parts of Rajasthan, for instance, a significant proportion of parents wanted their daughters to be taught by a female teacher.
- Female teachers are less brutal and their presence could *reduce the endemic violence in government schools*. Whenever we found a child who had dropped out after being beaten at school, the teacher was always male.
- The presence of female teachers at school contributes to a *balanced socialization* of pupils — girls and boys. As things stand, children in north India are brought up in a heavily male-dominated environment, and a male-dominated school cannot but reinforce this bias.
- Female teachers provide much-needed *role models* especially for girls. Several little girls echoed the child who said, '*Main madam adhyapika banna chahti hoon* (I want to be a lady teacher.'
- Some parents pointed out that the presence of a female teacher makes it *easier for mothers to interact with teachers.*

*'Female teachers can go from house to house and talk to parents about the importance of education. Because they are female this will be good for both mothers and daughters.'*  
An adivasi parent in Baniya (Damoh, M.P.)

According to some respondents, female teachers also have better teaching skills, due for instance to a better understanding of child psychology. This view, however, is more speculative, and not unanimously shared. Nor does the survey throw much light on this matter.

## ON TRAINING TO BE A TEACHER

Chances are high that many teachers in our country have not had the benefit of a good pre-service training for their job. For most candidates who wish to be teachers, there is an acute dearth of good teacher-training facilities and the quality of training programmes offered in the country is varied. To overcome this problem the NCTE (National Council of Teacher Education) has recently been set up with the aim of ensuring adequate standards in all teacher-training institutes.

Another problem is the content of the training course. For one thing, the content of the pre-service courses has not kept pace with changes in the field. Secondly, it is assumed that the higher a teacher's formal qualifications, the more suitable he or she is for the job. Thus, a BA would be preferred over a class-12 candidate with a BTC. Again, if there was a tussle between a BA BEd and an MA BEd then the latter would automatically be taken. Ironically, neither the BA nor the MA has any special relevance to young children, and the BEd is really a pre-service training for *secondary* school teaching. Only very recently has the BElemEd been introduced as a pilot project specially geared to the pre-service training of teachers to teach up till class-8 level.

One modality for addressing the problem of teacher training was through the setting up of DIETs (District Institutes of Education and Training), which are meant to provide contextualized teacher training at the district level. Since the DIET does not have its own cadre, it is often staffed with people from administrative jobs in the field. But they are unhappy with being sidelined in the DIETs and often wish to be back in the field. At the same time the constant transfers create their own problems of lack of a permanent stake. Primary-school teachers with years of experience are not considered eligible for appointment at DIETs because the system is too rigid to equate their experience with the required academic qualifications, or allow them space to acquire these qualifications.

The DIETs also generally fail to give hands-on training. They were meant to work with local schools and develop them as models where good teaching could be demonstrated — a kind of lab area as it were. Instead, the trainees are assigned to any schools in the vicinity. The regular teachers consider them as substitute teachers. There is no demonstration of good model teaching. Reality is given short shrift. Everything is geared to the sacred lesson plan.

In-service training of government-school teachers is more in line with current developments in the field as well as with the ground realities faced by the government-school teacher. For example, it has modules on multi-grade teaching. Teachers in tribal schools are also given special training. Unfortunately, though more teachers are being trained than ever before, there are many problems. In-service training is too short to impact teaching methods. Again, it cuts into teaching time — teachers are not willing to come after school or during vacations. The growing reliance on low-cost para-teachers has led to further erosion of teacher competence, already a major problem in, say, the teaching of mathematics. While it is claimed that para-teachers are as effective as regular teachers or even more so, this, if true, is mainly a reflection of the higher level of accountability among para-teachers (who have no job security). The experience of para-teachers does not detract from the need for concern about teacher preparedness and training.

Venita Kaul.

Meanwhile, the social background of *pupils* has significantly shifted in the direction of underprivileged groups, due not only to the massive entry of disadvantaged children into the schooling system, but also to a major shift towards private schooling among privileged families. Wide differences in educational background further enhance the social distance between teachers and their pupils' families. This social distance is one reason why many teachers have a limited commitment to the educational advancement of their pupils, as well as a limited understanding of their problems. On the positive side, Sem's commitment to the children of Baser illustrates the gains that are possible when a teacher identifies with the local community.

## ■ Qualifications and training

Most teachers at the primary stage have studied at least up to the completion of secondary school, and about two-thirds have also received some pre-service training. The most common type of pre-service training is the Basic Training Course (BTC), which usually lasts two years. Younger teachers tend to have higher general educational qualifications (e.g. two out of three have a BA or MA), but less pre-service training, suggesting that general education increasingly substitutes for pre-service training. Given the doubtful relevance of many of the general educational qualifications, it is a matter of some concern that one-third of the teachers had no pre-service training, rising to one-half among teachers below the age of 35.

Over half (56 per cent) of all class-1 teachers have received some in-service training, but the latter is a comparatively brief affair — typically one or two short-duration courses of about ten days at a time. Well-designed training programmes with plentiful human resources and follow-up guidance have achieved notable successes. In general, however, it is obviously difficult for crash courses to have a major impact on classroom processes. Most of the trained teachers

considered these courses 'useful', mainly in terms of gaining exposure to new teaching methods. But many added that it was hard to put the new principles in practice, if only because of the difficult classroom situation and poor infrastructure. Indeed, we found little evidence of in-service training having a practical impact on classroom processes. Many teachers had been trained to use the Operation Blackboard teaching kits, but teaching aids (whether from Operation Blackboard or any other) were seldom to be seen in the classrooms. Similarly, though special training for teaching class-1 children had been given to many teachers, class 1 was usually left to its own devices, or lumped together with other classes when teaching activity was in progress. In some cases, the new methods were judged frankly unrealistic by the teachers. One of them wryly commented that the innovative '*shabd gyan se akshar gyan*' method (i.e. learning words before learning letters) sounded to him like trying to climb a ladder from the top. Another teacher vividly described how he had been taught to make mango pickle, but when we asked him whether he had ever done it at school, he dismissed this naive idea, pointing out that the school had neither stove nor fuel nor utensils nor mangoes.

*An in-service training program : but the survey found little evidence of the impact of this training on classroom processes.*



SANJAY BARNIELA

Further, training programmes provide little space for enabling teachers to benefit from the insights which their peers have picked up from their own classroom practices — even teachers with limited formal qualifications often develop outstanding pedagogical skills through long years of experience. Opportunities for focused peer interaction would enrich and motivate teachers and also reduce the rural teacher's sense of isolation.

## ■ Ethics and attitudes

The female teacher in Bariyahi (Saharsa, Bihar) lives in the village and said that she interacted with the parents, especially the women. She keeps conveying to them information about nutrition, employment, loans and other such issues. When a new government scheme is announced, she is quick to bring it to the attention of the community. In this case the teacher perceived her role as extending beyond the classroom to the welfare of the community, and indeed the rural teacher *could* play a lead role in showing how education improves the quality of life.

This positive attitude, however, is uncommon. Instead, most teachers convey a deep lack of commitment to the

promotion of education in the local community, a pattern which relates to the issue of social distance mentioned earlier. They also perceive a lack of power among disadvantaged parents and this perhaps enables them to disregard their aspirations.

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*'If you ask the teacher, 'Why didn't you come for four days?', he will say, 'I was cutting the bajra.' And these teachers don't have small landholdings — more like 100 bighas.'*

*A villager from Surothi (Dholpur, Rajasthan), who lives next to the local school.*

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Perhaps one crucial issue then is the teacher's perception of his or her role (a job or a vocation), and another is the set of attitudes which he or she brings to this function as role model for young children. Few teachers see their work as a vocation. In rural areas, teaching posts tend to be seen as plum jobs, with good salaries, secure employment and plenty of time for other activities. Anyone with the required formal qualifications may be tempted to apply, including persons who have no intrinsic attraction to the job, no sympathy for children, or no commitment to the spread of education. Teacher selection focuses on academic qualifications and, in some states, has been further devalued by rampant corruption in the appointment process. In short, many recruits are unlikely to have a special aptitude or motivation for teaching.

One can go further and state that, aside from attracting poorly-motivated individuals, the teaching profession may be *detering* those who have a genuine attraction to teaching as a pedagogical or social endeavour. The school environment being what it is (see chapter 4), a person with such a vocation may feel that government schools in rural areas provide no scope for his or her skills to flourish. Private schools, or other professions, may look more attractive.

Having said this, the main issue may not be the low *initial* motivation of teachers as

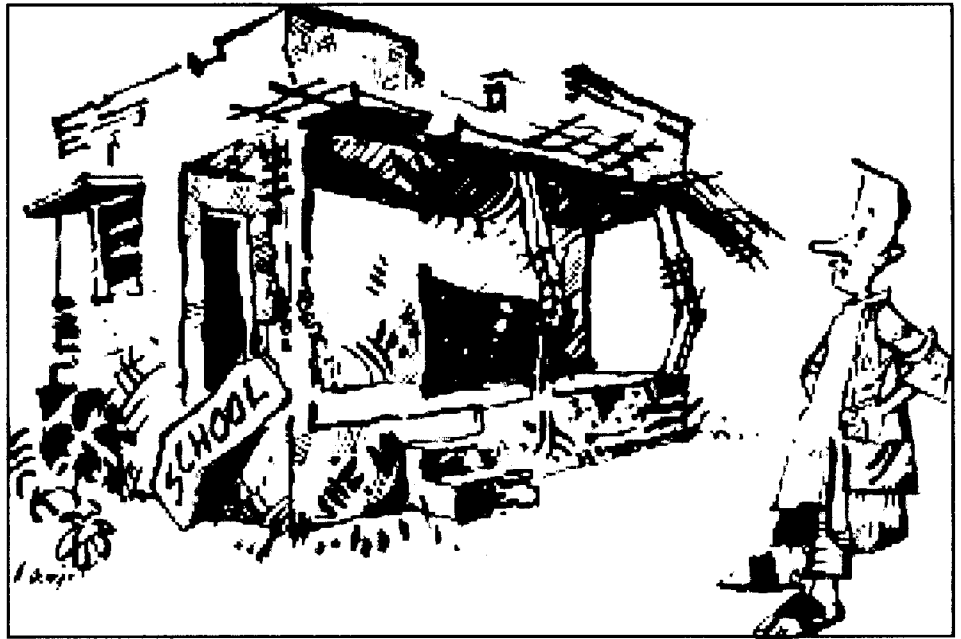
the fact that many of them *lose* their motivation over time. Indeed, among recently-appointed teachers we often met people with genuine enthusiasm. The honeymoon, however, is usually short-lived, as the morale of young teachers is battered day after day. The battering takes a variety of forms, examined in the next section.

## ■ 5.3. Teachers' Concerns

### ■ Poor infrastructure

Such are the working conditions in village schools that most teachers, of necessity, would find them tough, and even the most committed teacher could find his or her enthusiasm waning. Interestingly, a large majority of teachers declare being 'satisfied' with their salary (68 per cent) and leave entitlements (86 per cent). However, teachers do have many concerns of other kinds.

The most common complaint is that schools are under-equipped, under-funded, under-staffed and over-crowded. Poor infrastructural facilities were mentioned by 63 per cent of the teachers as one of the problems they face. This issue has been dealt with in some detail in the



preceding chapter, and there is no need to cover that ground again.

### ■ Parental apathy

Teachers are often frustrated by the apathy of parents towards their children's education. They complain that parents do not send their children to school regularly, or withdraw them for flimsy reasons. They also see much foot-dragging even when children are at school: parents send them late and in tattered clothes, try to dodge

the fees, and generally fail to watch their children's needs and progress. As teachers perceive it, their own efforts to keep the children at school are not reciprocated by the parents.

What especially discourages well-meaning teachers is the failure of many parents to participate in the schooling endeavour. For instance, efforts to set up a PTA (parent-teacher association) are often undermined by poor attendance at meetings. In some villages, teachers claim that even vigorous enrolment drives evoke little response. Sometimes parents are openly resentful of demands made by the school: one teacher in an urban municipal school quoted an irate parent as saying, '*Aap baar baar hamein bulate hain jaise aap prime minister ho. Hamein yeh chik chik baji achhi nahin lagti hai.* (You keep calling us again and again as if you were the prime minister. We don't like this nagging.)'

Lack of parental support can even take the extreme form of irresponsible or obstructive behaviour. In Hutup (Ranchi, Bihar), drunkenness is rampant and teachers even accuse parents of stealing rice meant for mid-day meals to buy liquor. The headmistress feels that the village is 'useless', and incapable of improving. In Basaura (Kanpur district, U.P.), teachers are wild with the villagers for keeping



## TEACHING IN A GOVERNMENT SCHOOL

Access to education in India is sharply skewed, even at the primary level. At one end are the resource-rich, mainly private schools that cater to a privileged few. At the other are a large number of ill-equipped and badly-managed government schools, which are supposed to educate the majority of children. The contrast between these two schooling systems is so stark that they are virtually different worlds altogether.

Having taught in an elite 'public school' in Delhi before moving to a government-administered girls' school in a resettlement colony (also in Delhi), I have realized that the two worlds, so to speak, are separated not merely by differences of resources but also in more fundamental ways. While the elite public school I taught in attempts to engage with the educational aspirations of its privileged clientele, the resettlement-colony school further debilitates any creative energies of its overwhelmingly lower-class and lower-caste students. In effect, education in the latter school is not a means of liberating children from the clutches of poverty and ignorance, but a way of reinforcing their destitution and defeated mindsets.

A majority of children in the resettlement school come from poor families. Their parents' occupations range from casual labour and rickshaw-pulling to street-vending and peon-type jobs in government offices. The children are undernourished, live in dingy hovels, carry the burden of household chores and have no access to any social support for their educational aspirations. Given their depressed environment and socio-economic handicaps, these children should have been entitled to special care and attention. The reverse, however, is true.

The resettlement school is ill-maintained. Toilets are non-functional: 1,500 students and 70 members of staff share one defective toilet. Electricity supply is erratic at best. During the summer, weeks often go by without any electricity, and even water is not available as the water pumps cannot work. Classrooms are poorly ventilated, that is, when a classroom is available at all. A large number of classes have to be conducted in makeshift corridors or spaces. When the weather precludes teaching in open spaces, two classes are packed into one room. This leads to an absurd situation where one teacher is trying to impart, say, the principles of geometry in one corner while students in another corner are muddling through a lesson in social science. Students have no desks and make do by balancing their books on their laps. Add to this the stench of the one toilet pervading the whole school, filth everywhere and mounds of dust. Thus the students make no transition from their oppressive poverty at home.

The curriculum, for its part, is drastically at variance with the life these children live. By focusing on upper-middle class experiences, it further alienates them from the world of knowledge. They are simply unable to relate to the finer subtleties of birthday parties, balanced diets, family holidays or multi-storeyed homes. Being a teacher of English, I have come to realize that the curriculum is utterly incomprehensible to these underprivileged children.

Besides, much teaching is conducted in an abusive and callous manner. There is a tangible, even if unintended, process of eroding the children's self-esteem, dignity and respect. For these children, the school does not open up a new world of learning and knowledge; instead, it reproduces the destitute physical and psychological environment in which they live.

When I took up the job, I sincerely believed that individual effort would bear fruit even in a government school. Now I realize that the perpetuation of the status quo depends on the system's ability to break down dissenting voices. The latitude for initiative and creativity is very limited.

For instance, I tried to engage the children with low-cost teaching aids and story books. But there were no shelves or storage space in the classrooms, and when charts or displays were left behind, they didn't survive the second shift. Thus to the lack of essential items such as chalk (which I have to buy from my own pocket) has been added the almost complete absence of basic teaching aids. Teaching therefore becomes transitory, with no ideas developing through the benefit of contextuality or familiarity.

Also frustrating is the absolute focus on getting the students to pass the exams, and that too only through rote learning. A teacher's performance is judged only by the pass percentage of his or her students. Efforts to promote the joy of learning or the pupils' understanding are not recognized as an act of teaching. Inevitably I am boxed into the position of concentrating on the syllabus, which furthermore has to be hammered across all students in a class regardless of their differing abilities and learning speeds. The limitations of time, an exam-centred approach and the failure of the system to address the special needs of disadvantaged students mean that they get marginalized. Willy-nilly, I find myself contributing to this process. It is truly debilitating to have to teach a class knowing that a substantial section is being further distanced from education. In effect I am compelled to reinforce the inequities of the system.

*Snehlata Gupta*

animals tied in classrooms, wrecking the school building, stealing school material, and even ploughing the compound. Rivalling with them are villagers in Pachlavra (Hoshangabad, M.P.), led by the *sarpanch*, who are said to have looted the school building, leaving nothing behind except obscene graffiti.

## ■ Difficult pupils

Adding to parental apathy is the fact that children themselves are difficult to handle. In many families, the home environment is not conducive to studies, making the teacher's task all the more difficult. Some teachers commented on the exhausting task of beginning all over again after every vacation in the absence of any follow-up at home. Many children are first-generation learners, armed with just one alphabet text and one slate. Further learning difficulties arise from malnutrition, poor health, irregular attendance, and the burden of household work. Some teachers take the view that a substantial proportion of their pupils are simply unteachable.

## ■ Paralysing curriculum

The school curriculum which teachers are expected to cover is highly demanding for most young children. For instance, according to recent guidelines (read instructions) on 'minimum levels of learning', every class-5 pupil is expected to master not only the three Rs but also subjects as diverse as 'the progress of man from early times to the present age', 'the relationship between the Central, State and local-self governments', and 'the present schemes (a few) to increase and improve forest cover, cleaning rivers, tanks and such others'. To make things worse, these subjects are often presented in an abstruse or alienating manner in the textbooks (see chapter 6).

The school curriculum is all the more challenging for underprivileged children whose learning potential is often diminished by undernourishment, exhaustion from physical work, and the absence of a learning environment at home. It is not surprising that teachers

*Tougher to  
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many pupils  
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who have to impart an unrealistic curriculum to such children often feel that the battle is lost from the start. The temptation, in such a situation, may well be to give up altogether, rather than focus on helping children to learn at a more gentle pace.

## ■ Unwanted postings

Many teachers are anxious to avoid being posted in remote or 'backward' villages. One practical reason is the inconvenience of commuting, or of living in a remote village with poor facilities. (There is no compensation for remote postings; on the contrary, teachers receive higher living allowances when they are posted in urban areas.) Another common reason is alienation from the local residents, who are sometimes said to be squandering their money on liquor, to have no potential for education, or simply to 'behave like

monkeys'. Remote or backward areas are also seen as infertile ground for a teacher's efforts. Said a primary-school teacher in Heda Khan (Nainital district, U.P.):

Parents here do not even see to it that their children are clean. They have very hard lives. Men do little, mainly porter's work. Women do all the forest work. Most of the children come to school hungry. They don't reach home till 4 p.m. Some walk for upto an hour to get to the school in good weather, more during the monsoon. In other areas, we could take tuitions. Here the parents are too poor. I found more job satisfaction teaching in a private school for a lower salary because of the good learning environment created by the management.

## DISTRACTING DUTIES

The burden of 'non-teaching duties' is often cited as a major reason why teachers are unable to concentrate on teaching. Examples of such duties, (other than school administration) include helping with the decennial census, the cattle census, anti-poverty schemes, health programmes, literacy campaigns and vote counting. While some of these duties have much social value, the diversion of teaching time is a serious matter. How real is the problem?

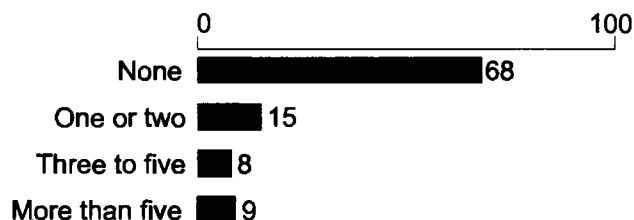
Few of the class-1 teachers interviewed as part of the PROBE survey spontaneously mentioned non-teaching duties as one of their major problems. A little over two-thirds had not spent a single day in non-teaching duties during the previous four weeks. And the average number of days spent in non-teaching duties in that period was only two. However, a closer look at the facts shows reason for concern. One-sixth of the class-1 teachers had spent at least three days in non-teaching duties during the previous four weeks, and the proportion may well be higher for headteachers. In single-teacher schools, non-teaching duties mean that the school has to be closed. One teacher in Kurashna (Dewas, M.P.) reported that his school had been closed for as many as 27 days over the year on account of the following non-teaching duties: health programmes (four days), IRDP survey (seven days), illiteracy survey (seven days), monthly distribution of food rations to pupils (nine days). Perhaps the greatest danger of non-teaching duties is the message they might convey to the teacher: that teaching is not a priority.

CHART 5.2

### Non-teaching Duties

Proportion(%) of class-1 teachers who spent a given number of days in non-teaching duties during the four weeks preceding the survey:

Number of days:



Relative incidence of different types of non-teaching duties\*:

Panchayat or community related**	38
Health-related	33
Administrative work	17
Midday-meal related	10
Training-related	10
Incentive-related	9
Family-planning related	7
Other	9

\* Proportion(%) of class 1- teachers who performed the stated duty, among those who spent at least one day in non-teaching duties during the four weeks preceding the survey. The options are not mutually exclusive.

\*\* Includes literacy campaigns

Source: PROBE survey.

Unwanted postings and arbitrary transfers are seen as a constant threat. Teachers spend a great deal of time and energy trying to avoid undesirable transfers, lobbying for preferred postings, and building up influential connections to play the transfer game. This syndrome has become a major diversion in the teaching profession.

## Excessive paperwork

Several teachers complained about the pressure of administrative chores, from filling numerous registers to writing reports and keeping accounts. In areas where schools are grouped in 'clusters', with one school acting as the nodal school for the cluster, the administrative burden on this nodal school is often substantial. Elsewhere, too, the PROBE investigators often found that one or more teachers were busy with administration during school hours. The administrative burden seems to be expanding over time, notably due to the growing importance of various incentive schemes for pupils. Teachers also have to deal with other kinds of 'non-teaching duties', all of which are potential diversions from teaching.

## Unsupportive management

The school management structure is not geared to supporting the efforts of a responsible teacher. To start with, it often fails in its role of removing the simple obstacles in the teacher's path. The provision of textbooks and teaching aids, for instance, is inadequate and haphazard. Teachers routinely receive the wrong textbooks (if any), or get them at the end of the year, or find themselves with half as many textbooks as there are pupils. In some cases, the management structure even becomes a source of harassment. Inspectors, for instance, often expect monetary inducements — one anxious teacher volunteered a bribe as soon as the PROBE investigators turned up.



## WHY PROBE SCHOOLS HAD FEW FEMALE TEACHERS

The school at Murkhudiya (Nainital, U.P.) had only one teacher. A second teacher had been appointed as headmistress but had not taken up her post. Her brother had come to the school once — to survey the area and help his sister to change her posting on the grounds that life in a remote hill village was too exacting for an elderly woman. The headmistress's reluctance is not uncommon. Female teachers, old or young, are loath to take up posts in rural areas, and especially in remote villages. These areas are problematic for women for many reasons.

For one thing, it is tough for women teachers to find residential accommodation and live alone in a rural area, because of inadequate facilities and lack of safety (real or perceived). In Singapatti (Mathura district, U.P.), there have been several recent cases of molestation and sexual harassment of female teachers. The female teacher at Neri (Sultanpur district, U.P.) was reluctant to stay in the village in the quarters available to her as she was afraid of *goondas*. Commuting is sometimes a possibility but it has its own drawbacks, from inconvenience to time waste and physical insecurity.

Patriarchal norms enhance the problem. The family of a young, unmarried female teacher in north India would hesitate to let her to take up a rural posting. If the teacher is married, then she would be expected to live where her husband has employment rather than the other way around. Married teachers also have to face the double burden of teaching and household work.

The stress of patriarchal norms extends even to the school premises. Aside from occasional sexual harassment, female teachers are widely treated as second-class employees by their male colleagues. In several cases, the female teacher was bossed around by junior male teachers, e.g. asked to make tea while they talked with the PROBE investigators. Female teachers were almost invariably expected to fetch the registers, irrespective of their formal status. In one school, the headmaster had no knowledge of what was happening in the school; the questions had to be answered by the female teacher, who was obviously doing all the work. In Gingla (Udaipur, Rajasthan), the four male teachers sat on chairs talking to the PROBE investigators while the female teacher, who was pregnant, stood behind them with her face veiled.

A special problem for female teachers is the absence of toilet facilities. And this problem is not confined to rural areas. One female teacher posted in Delhi gave us a harrowing account of the torture she endures in the summer, when she has to abstain from drinking even a cup of tea during school hours, for want of toilet facilities. This is a telling illustration of the lack of sensitivity of the schooling system to the needs of female teachers.

*The BDO (Block Development Officer) at Alwar, Rajasthan gave a revealing example of the attitude of government officers to the teacher's task. On being told that there is a break in continuity for children when a teacher is called up for livestock census, literacy work and so on, the BDO 'reiterated the popular perception that primary school classes can be taught by any teacher as there is no specialization or expertise required to teach small children. Also teachers can easily substitute for each other.'*

*(Geetha Nambissan, 1997).*

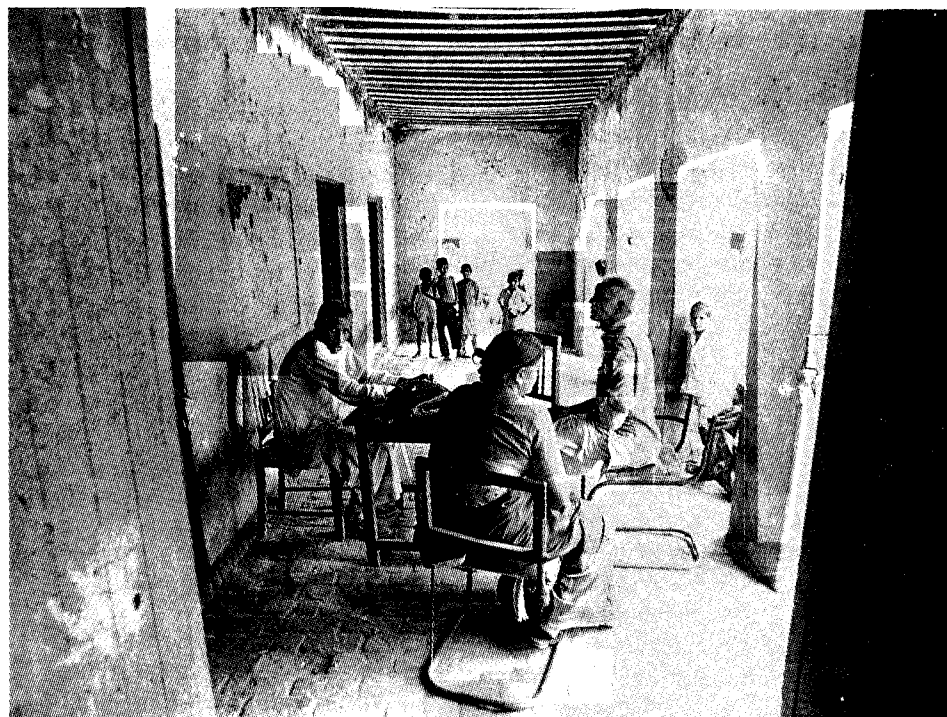
**F**urther, a responsible teacher gets no recognition for his or her efforts. As teachers see it, the quality of teaching is the least of all the concerns of their superiors. The main focus is on school records, enrolment figures, incentive schemes, and other administrative matters. In line with this lack of concern for the quality of teaching, the management structure has allowed teachers to become multi-purpose agents who are mobilized from a variety of quarters. Inspectors expect them to complete various administrative tasks, involving the maintenance of numerous registers. Government departments use them for all kinds of non-teaching duties. Party leaders strive to use them as political agents. Conscientious teaching is the least prominent and the most thankless of the activities they are expected to perform.

## ■ 5.4. Accountability Issues

### ■ The accountability problem

**G**iven the disempowering environment in which they work, it is not surprising that teachers find it hard to maintain decent schooling standards. All good teaching

Right:  
In half of the  
sample schools,  
there was no  
teaching activity  
at the time of the  
investigators' visit.



ANAL SHAH

### DUTY CALLS — BUT FAINTLY

When the investigators reached the primary school in Jotri Peepal (Bharatpur, Rajasthan) shortly after noon, no teacher was in sight. One teacher, who had apparently left for lunch, soon appeared. He said that the school actually had three teachers, but that the headmaster and another teacher had gone elsewhere on official duty.

The villagers contradicted this story. They said that the two absconding teachers did not turn up at all. The only one who did was the one the investigators had met, a '10th pass' *shiksha karmi*. He too was highly irregular and opened the school at will.

Jotri Peepal is a remote village, never visited by inspectors. It is also a very poor village inhabited mainly by the Muslim Meos. The people are keen on education, though they would like to have Urdu as one of the subjects taught. The teachers, for their part, seem to have little regard for these aspirations. Even the *shiksha karmi* felt that there was no point in educating the children of agricultural labourers in this isolated village.

requires enormous reserves of spirit, and when dealing with young children, even considerable physical energy. A teacher trapped in a ramshackle village school, surrounded by disgruntled parents, irregular pupils and overbearing inspectors, can hardly be expected to work with any enthusiasm.

Yet, the deterioration of teaching standards has gone much too far to be explained by the disempowerment factor alone. The PROBE survey came across many instances where an element of plain negligence was also involved. These include several cases of irresponsible teachers keeping a school closed or non-functional for months at a time; a school where the teacher was drunk, while only one-sixth of the children enrolled were present; other drunk teachers, some of whom expect pupils to bring them *daru*; a headteacher who asks the children to do domestic chores, including looking after the baby; several cases of teachers sleeping at school; a husband-wife team who took turns in coming to school; a headteacher who comes to school once a week; another headteacher who did not know the name of a single child in the school; and so on down the line. We also note in passing that, during the selection of investigators for the PROBE survey, no

less than three government primary-school teachers offered their services, in the middle of the school year, for three months at a stretch.

These extreme cases, however, are perhaps less devastating than the quiet inertia of the majority of teachers who keep an appearance of dignity. As we saw in chapter 4, in half of the sample schools there was no teaching activity at the time of the investigators' visit. It is significant that this pattern occurred even in cases where the school infrastructure (in terms of number of classrooms, teaching aids and even teacher-pupil ratio) was relatively good. Inactive teachers were found engaged in a variety of pastimes such as sipping tea, reading comics or eating peanuts, when they were not just sitting idle. Generally, teaching activity has been reduced to a minimum, in terms of both time and effort. And this pattern is not confined to a minority of irresponsible teachers — it has become a way of life in the profession.

There are also positive examples of the fact that, to some extent, teachers can improve teaching standards even within the existing environment. The shining accomplishments of committed teachers such as Sem and Anjali (and many others)

illustrate this point. It is also worth noting that, by all accounts, teaching standards used to be higher in the past, when work conditions were — in many respects — even more challenging than they are today. Another illustration is the high level of teaching activity in private schools, even makeshift ones where the work environment is no better than in government schools (see chapter 8).

This feature of private schools brings out the key role of *accountability* in the schooling system. In a private school, the teachers are accountable to the manager (who can fire them), and, through him or her, to the parents (who can withdraw their children). In a government school, the chain of accountability is much weaker, as teachers have a permanent job with salaries and promotions unrelated to performance. This contrast is perceived with crystal clarity by the vast majority of parents.

We are not making a case here for private schools, which have their own problems (see chapter 8). Nor are we arguing against job security, which is a standard feature of the teaching profession in many countries. The point is that accountability mechanisms of *some* kind are essential to protect the work culture of the teaching profession. Seen in that light, it is also clear that accountability need not be an 'anti-teacher' concern — teachers themselves have a stake in the integrity of their profession. In this connection, it is interesting to note that a majority of teachers find inspections 'helpful' (*despite* the absence of any follow-up action on their complaints), mainly as a means of 'enhancing teacher attendance'.

To conclude, improved teaching standards depend on two essential steps: a more supportive work environment, and enhanced accountability. Focusing on accountability alone would be missing a large part of the context of teacher inertia, just as it would be naive to expect a better environment alone to transform teaching standards. The two measures are best seen as complementary and mutually reinforcing.

## ■ Whither accountability?

Ensuring teacher accountability is not an easy task. For one thing, a teacher's performance is difficult to observe: his or her work has no clear-cut 'output', though some indirect indications of teaching standards can be obtained from spot-check inspections, pupil's exam scores, and so on. For another, there is no obvious way of linking performance (if observed) with a fair and effective system of rewards and sanctions. These features are by no means unique to the teaching profession, but this is a case where they are fairly prominent.

*'Target-chasing is simply the wrong way to handle teachers. Take the MLL approach — at first all teachers were supposed to achieve 80/80 results i.e. 80 per cent of the children were supposed to have achieved 80 per cent competence level. When the teachers were asked what competence level had been achieved by 80 per cent of the students, they invariably answered "eighty". Later this demand was felt to be unrealistic so the competence level was changed to 60 per cent. Now when the teachers were asked what competence level had been achieved they answered — "sixty".'*

Venita Kaul, NCERT.

In practice, what tends to happen is that teacher accountability derives from a variety of formal and informal incentives. Each of these incentives tends to be quite imperfect on its own, but together they can go a long way towards protecting the work culture. Promotion opportunities, for instance, can be a useful way of encouraging teachers to do their best. In a more disciplinarian vein, sanctions such as transfers may help to contain chronic absenteeism and related practices. Within the school, the authority of the headteacher plays a similar role, with varying effects depending on the headteacher's own commitment and his or her rapport with the teachers. Peer pressure is an example of informal

incentive within the school: while teachers may not be keen to exert themselves, they have an interest in preventing *other* teachers from shirking (because it increases their own work-load). Another important incentive derives from a teacher's concern for his or her reputation in the village community. The strength of this reputation effect, however, depends on whether the teacher identifies with the local community, and on the extent to which parents understand what goes on in the classroom. Last but not least, there may be some *community accountability*, building on institutions such as parent-teacher associations, the village *panchayat* and informal channels of interaction between teachers and the community.

The details of the accountability process are hard to identify, even from the PROBE survey. This is a subject on which further research would be most useful. Meanwhile, what is clear is that most of the potential incentives have lost their sharp edge. This, in turn, is due to a combination of managerial irresponsibility and organized resistance on the part of the teaching profession. To illustrate, consider the issue of promotions. In most states, teacher promotions are entirely seniority-based, making them useless as incentive devices. Teachers' organizations have tended to press for seniority-based promotion, but this demand, in turn, has to be understood in the light of the abuses to which a system of discretionary promotions lends itself. When promotions are (supposedly) based on a teacher's record, what often happens in practice is that they are used to reward political loyalty or personal favours. It is understandable that teachers want to protect themselves from arbitrary treatment.

Another important example concerns examinations. Notwithstanding their flaws as a method of evaluating *pupils* (see chapter 6), school examinations give parents important information about the performance of *teachers*. For instance, if all the pupils in a school fail the Board exam in class 5, parents are likely to ask pointed questions about what the teachers were doing in the classroom. Knowing this, teachers have an incentive to ensure that children do reasonably well

in the exams. However, automatic promotion of children until class 8 or even class 10 has become an accepted practice in many states, and so is mass copying when exams do take place. Here again, teachers' organizations have played a part in dismantling the examination system, yet their outlook has to be seen in the light of the paralysing burden placed on them by current examination procedures (see chapter 6).

Similar contradictions have undermined other accountability mechanisms. Halting the erosion of teacher accountability calls *inter alia* for a new rapport between teachers' organizations and the education administration, based on a shared commitment to universal elementary education. Another important step is to improve the framework of teacher-parent interaction, which may well be the most promising basis of accountability in the schooling system.

## 5.5. Teachers and the Village Community

In the preceding sections, we identified two causes of teacher inertia: a demotivating environment, and lack of accountability. In both respects, a cooperative rapport between teachers and parents (and the village community in general) can help a great deal. Going beyond that, education is intrinsically a joint task of parents and teachers, in so far as a child acquires education not only at school but also at home. It is all the more important that the efforts of teachers and parents should complement rather than undermine each other.

### Patterns of teacher-parent relations

Parents and teachers have a tendency to blame each other for the failures of the schooling system. This situation may sound like the death-knell of teacher-parent relations. However, some mutual criticism is quite natural in this context,

## ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS AND THEIR WEAKNESSES

### Examples of accountability mechanisms

### Why they are quite weak in practice

Teacher promotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promotions are seniority-based</li> <li>- Difficult to assess teachers in a fair and objective manner</li> </ul>
Transfers and other sanctions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unwanted transfers are resisted by teachers' organizations</li> </ul>
Inspection system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of follow-up (see chapter 7)</li> </ul>
Supervision by the headteacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Headteacher post in primary schools effectively abolished in many states</li> <li>- Headteacher often not in control of the teachers</li> </ul>
Teacher concern for reputation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Due to social distance from parental community, teacher may not be too concerned</li> </ul>
Peer pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Corroded work culture</li> <li>- Collusion among teachers</li> </ul>
Community accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents have little power</li> <li>- Over-centralized administration</li> <li>- Inspectors don't consult parents</li> <li>- Parents may find it difficult to judge what goes on at school</li> </ul>

and does not necessarily rule out practical cooperation. In fact, given the current state of affairs, it would be quite worrying if parents were full of praise for teachers or vice versa. Their respective demands do have a positive role to play in the improvement of the schooling system. The real problem is not that people complain, but that private grumbles fail to translate into constructive action.

The nature of teacher-parent relations varies a great deal between different villages. In a minority of villages, there is active cooperation. In Khurd (Dholpur, Rajasthan), for instance, the teacher has won the appreciation of the village community for his punctuality and sense of duty, setting in motion a virtuous circle of good will. At the other extreme, there are cases

of palpable tension between teachers and the parental community. This applies in Bisariya (Ranchi, Bihar), where parents ended up appointing a retired teacher to help in the local school, deserted by its own headteacher. Antagonism is also the norm with non-functional schools, which reflect a fundamental breakdown of the teacher-parent relation. An intermediate pattern arises when teachers are identified with specific factions within the village. This is particularly frequent in villages with sharp divisions of caste and class. The rapport between teachers and the sarpanch often plays a crucial role in factional alignments.

Perhaps the most common pattern is one of scant interaction between parents and teachers. Parents, even if unhappy, see

little scope to influence the teachers. The latter, for their part, have limited interest in active interaction with parents, or may be satisfied with selective interaction. Two-thirds of the headteachers we interviewed felt that the attitude of parents towards the school was 'helpful', but what they understood by this reflected low expectations of parental cooperation: asked to elaborate, the most frequent comment was that parents helped by sending their children to school regularly. Less than 30 per cent of the headteachers reported that they had asked for any specific help from the parents during the preceding 12 months and obtained a 'favourable' response. On both sides, inertia is the dominant attitude.

## ■ Formal participatory institutions

It is partly to tackle this problem of collective inertia that efforts have been made to set up formal institutions aimed at promoting greater interaction between teachers and parents. Two examples are 'parent-teacher associations' (PTAs) and 'village education committees' (VECs). The PROBE survey, however, suggests that these institutions are themselves quite dormant. Less than one-fifth of the schools surveyed had a PTA. And even the PTAs that did exist seldom went beyond formalities. Some met only on 15 August and 26 January for snacks or a brief celebration, following an earlier tradition of inviting parents to the local school on those days.

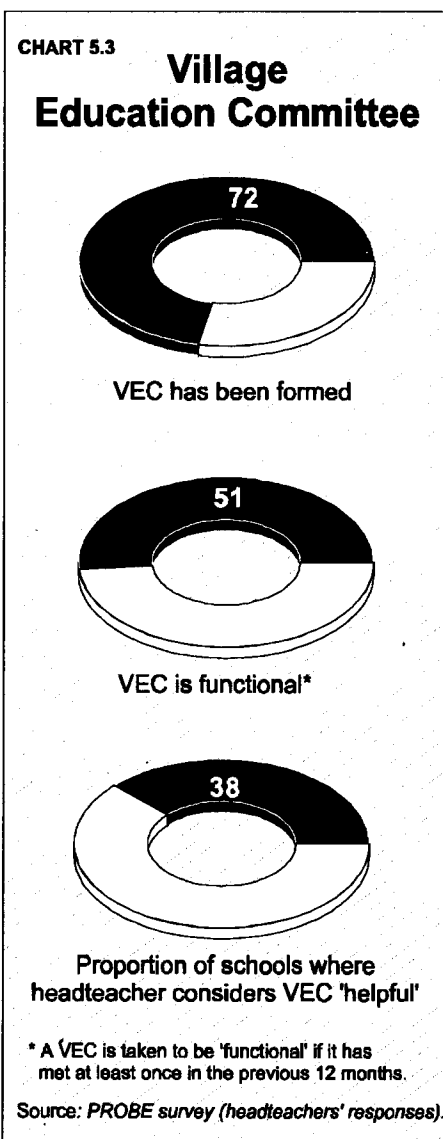
Village education committees are doing only a little better. About half of the sample schools belonged to a village with a functional VEC, 'functional' being understood in the liberal sense that the VEC had met at least once during the preceding 12 months. We found some cases of active VECs, as in Jamnagari (Betul, M.P.), where the VEC helped the local teacher to do a literacy survey, and in a few other villages where the VEC seemed to perform some useful supervisory function. In areas where VECs are set up in the context of a broader and well-rehearsed effort to improve the schooling system, such as the Lok Jumbish programme in parts of Rajasthan (see chapter 8), they seem to take off. By and large, however, VECs seem to be token institutions, with neither teachers nor parents expecting much from them. As with PTAs, a large proportion of VECs were found to be meeting mainly on Independence Day and Republic Day, even though they are supposed to hold regular meetings. One reason for this lack of dynamism seems to be that these committees were formed in a top-down manner, based on government directives rather than any felt need of the community. As one teacher bluntly put it, '*VEC bolo, PTA bolo, jo sarkar ka hukum hai, vo hum karte hain* (call it the VEC, call it the PTA, we follow whatever orders the government gives us).'

Another potential tool of parent-teacher cooperation is the village panchayat. In many villages, however, the functioning of the village panchayat is far from democratic, with the sarpanch taking most of the decisions. This means that popular aspirations may be poorly represented in the village panchayat, and matter much less than the personal rapport between sarpanch and teacher. The latter shows interesting variations between different villages. There are many cases of collusion between teacher and sarpanch, both of whom hold positions of local influence and power. Even cases of teacher-sarpanch collusion at the expense of the village community are not uncommon. In Mohangarh Bhata (Tikamgarh, M.P.), for instance, the duo strikes fear in the hearts of the villagers, to the extent that they are too scared to talk openly about the state of the village school.

In other cases, teacher and sarpanch are at loggerheads. This often applies in Madhya Pradesh, where sarpanchs have some real power over local teachers as a result of recent *panchayati raj* reforms. Teachers often resent this situation, especially if they consider themselves to have a higher social status than the sarpanch. Some teachers did not hide their anger at being at the mercy — as they see it — of an 'illiterate' (*angootha chhaap*) sarpanch, sometimes a woman at that. Another common bone of contention is the mid-day meal (or 'dry rations') scheme, for which teacher and sarpanch are jointly responsible in some areas, leading to mutual accusations of corruption. The PROBE survey came across several instances of a teacher being transferred because he or she had fallen out with the sarpanch, and also of teachers not speaking up against a corrupt sarpanch for fear of transfer. While panchayat supervision of local teachers may have some potential as an accountability mechanism, there does seem to be a real danger of abuse by despotic sarpanchs.

## ■ Informal interaction

Lack of active parent-teacher interaction is a serious shortcoming of the schooling system as it exists today. Parental apathy plays a major role in this pattern, com-



pounding the problem of teacher inertia discussed earlier. Parents are individually interested in education, and have many private complaints, but they have shown little ability to act collectively on these complaints. While they have good reasons to feel somewhat powerless, their collective power is also underused.

In looking for ways to achieve a more participatory schooling system, it is important to take a broad view of the potential tools of parent-teacher interaction. Formal institutions such as VECs and PTAs have a role to play, and some of these institutions can probably be developed with good effect, as has already been done in some areas. But much can also happen outside these formal channels of parent-teacher interaction. In areas where schools function relatively well, informal parent-teacher interaction does seem to play an important role. Face-to-face meetings between teachers and individual parents is one example of such interaction (for which the school calendar makes explicit room in some urban schools). As noted earlier, even without face-to-face meetings a teacher who has a healthy concern for his or her reputation in the village society is likely to be sensitive to parental views. Other examples of informal parent-teacher interaction mentioned in the PROBE survey include spontaneous parental initiatives to build extra classrooms or to collect money for the school, indirect interaction through political leaders, *mahila mandal* resolutions, representations and petitions to government offices, setting up of rival private schools, and even a cat strike by school kids themselves (see section 8.6).

The agenda, thus, is not just to activate VECs, PTAs or even panchayats. Much can certainly be done in that respect, e.g. by giving these institutions more concrete decision-making powers than to organize Independence Day celebrations. But the real challenge is to achieve greater popular involvement in schooling issues, through *all* available channels. This participatory process can be facilitated by the government, but it is not its sole responsibility. This is one motivation for this appeal (the PROBE report) to popular

organizations and the public at large to get more involved in educational matters.

# 6

## CHAPTER SIX

# inside the classroom



SONDEEP SHANKAR

### 6.1. The Burden of Non-comprehension

**A** municipal primary school in a prestigious locality of government officers in central Delhi. A well-maintained building, reflecting the status of the sahebs whose servants' children study here. Spacious classrooms, large glass windows with sunlight streaming in, and tidy mats for children to sit on. In class 3, a lesson on 'air' was being taught. The teacher mechanically uttered certain 'scientific facts', almost religiously reiterating what was said in the textbook. As if in one breath, all the 'lakshan' or 'properties' of air come gushing out:

*Vayu sabhi jagah vidyaman hai.*  
(Air is everywhere.)

*Vayu sthan gherti hai.*  
(Air occupies space.)

*Vayu ka apna koi aakaar nahin.*  
(Air has no shape of its own.)

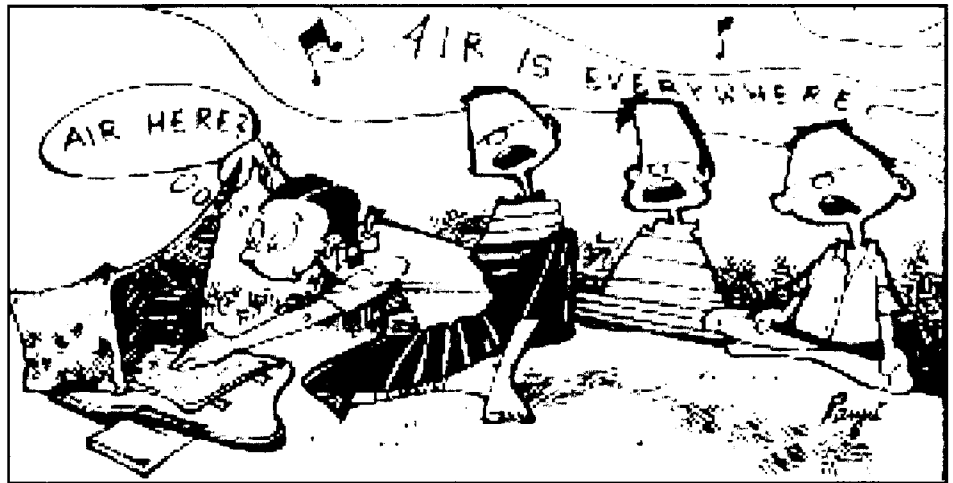
*Vayu kai gason ka mishran hai.*  
(Air is a mixture of gases.)

*Gas padarth ki ek avastha hai.*  
(Gas is one state of matter.)

**T**he pupils, 8 - 9 year olds, were made to recite these *mantras* in chorus. Even if they tried, they would not be able to make much sense of such cryptic statements. In traditional reverence to the divine

utterance of the teacher (who in turn follows the tenets of the textbook), children continued the incantation as if under an awesome spell of these chants. We attempt to make a friendly intervention: 'Tumne abhi abhi suna ki 'hava sabhi jagah vidyaman hai', yani hava sabhi jagah hoti hai. Kya aisa hota hai? Kya tumhare baste mein bhi hava hai? (Air is everywhere. Is it, really? Is there air in your bag?)' Most deny emphatically, quite possessively confident of the details of their own belongings. However, a few curious and enterprising ones do innocently peep into their school bags to see if this unknown elusive element somehow entered unnoticed!

**A** not-so-innocent peep inside their school bags might reveal much more, especially to those who have been following the national debate on the 'burden of schooling'. A few years ago, the eminent writer R.K. Narayan made a moving speech in the Rajya Sabha to highlight the issue of the heavy load of the school bag carried by young children. A National Advisory Committee was set up under the chairmanship of Prof. Yashpal, and its report *Learning Without Burden*, (Government of India, 1993) made perceptive comments on the educational system of the country and how to change it. The major flaw was codified in the statement that 'a lot is taught, but little is learnt or understood'. This is as incongruous as a shopkeeper saying 'we sold a lot of goods, but the customers



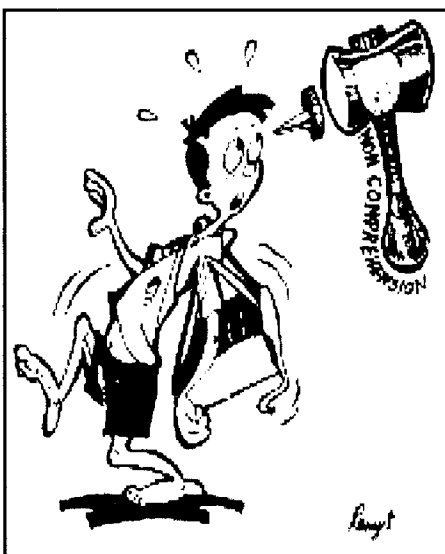
bought very little! Indeed, teaching is a transaction, a negotiation, which *cannot* be accomplished unilaterally, without ensuring that what is taught is actually learnt and understood. Unfortunately, in our system teaching is merely doling out information; the course has to be 'covered', but nothing is to be 'discovered'. According to *Learning without Burden*, the gravitational load of the school bag is one issue, but 'the more pernicious burden is that of non-comprehension'.

**T**he above example from a municipal school in Delhi illustrates how this burden of non-comprehension routinely manifests itself even in a relatively privileged urban classroom. This lesson on 'air' will be taught in almost the same fashion in most schools across the country. The same axioms will be repeated and similar mantras recited, without any concern for what a young child may or may not comprehend. Various studies have shown that children even at the age of twelve years tend to resist the formal axiom 'air is everywhere'. They generally associate the concept of air with movement, with a flow, or with a breeze, and find it difficult to believe that there is air in a closed container or a flat tyre. Indeed, one girl said she would 'run outside with a container facing the wind to fill it with air'. However, our schools shall continue undeterred, piously preaching that 'air is everywhere', in an intriguingly similar vein to 'God is everywhere'. Just as the latter statement is expected never to be questioned, requires no validation and needs to be accepted in good faith, the former

too seems to vie for a similar position of authority.

**T**he mantras shall not remain short and cryptic, but will progress to more 'impressive' long-winded tongue-twisters, which most children (and many teachers too) cannot even pronounce. Ironically, the class-3 textbook for non-formal schools in Madhya Pradesh (*Baal Pothi*, SCERT, Bhopal, 1990), meant for children who are unable to attend formal schools, is even more terse, and revels in such tongue-twisters. Since the same syllabus is compressed into a 'non-formal' course, which these children are expected to 'cover' in just two hours a day, and in fewer years than the pupils of a regular primary school, the packaging of information surpasses all norms of rational curriculum planning.

**T**he lesson on 'Weather', for instance, packs a diverse collection of topics including rain, cloud formation, vaporization, dew, the water cycle, snow formation, winds, weather forecasting, and so on. Strangely, it contains a diagram (without any mention of what it actually is) of a crystal-like snow flake seen through a microscope, normally shown to students of higher classes in lessons on crystal formation! In the two 'experiments' ritualistically described, it talks of '*barabar aakaar aur akriti wali dhatu ki do platen* (two metallic plates of equal size and shape)' and '*kuchh barf aur pani, kaanch ki ek saaf jar mein* (some ice and water in a clean glass jar)', without bothering to check if such objects are ever available at non-formal centres, or even formal





schools. Indeed, how many village schools have access to 'some ice in a clean glass jar'?

In any case, it is absurd to use abstract terms such as 'metallic plates of similar shape and size' (an especially dense expression in Hindi) with young children, making the textbook sound esoteric and unnecessarily 'scientific'. The same thing can be said using simple terms such as '*steel ya pital ke dhakkan, jo ek hi jaise hon*' or just '*thaaalis*'. In fact, textbooks deliberately tend to use complicated language, even where simple words can be used. For instance, instead of saying '*zamin ke paas*' or '*pani ki bhap*' the book (and the teacher, on cue) would normally resort to '*bhoomi ke nikat*' or '*jal vashp*'. The lesson on 'Weather' pontificates in this vein about air, vapour and other 'misty' things, using dense statements such as:

*Kabhi kabhi pani ki vashp bhoomi ke nikat hi baadal banaati hai. Is prakar ke baadalon ko kohra kehate hain. Jab pani ki vashp bhoomi ke nikat thos padaarthon ke chhote-chhote kanon par drav ban jati hai to kohra paida hota hai.*

The last sentence is incomprehensible for a child not just in class 3 but also in class 8! Abstract concepts of water vapour, condensation, small particles of solid substances (*thos padaarth*), and the formation of mist, are all covered in one sentence. Moreover, the language used is criminally insensitive to children, and



violates their natural form of expression and comprehension. The tendency to 'package' as much information in as few sentences as possible, and to target children with encapsulated 'bullets', is an overarching trend in curriculum development and textbook preparation. As *Learning without Burden* notes:

... our textbooks are not written from the child's viewpoint. Neither the mode of communication, nor the selection of objects depicted, nor the language conveys the centrality of the child in the world constructed [by the school]... Words, expressions and nuances commonly used by children in their milieu are absent,... and an artificial style dominates, reinforcing the tradition of distancing knowledge from life. The language used in textbooks thus deepens the sense of 'burden' attached to all school-related knowledge.



## THE BURDEN OF EMPTY SCHOOLBAGS

'The school bag has become an inevitable burden for the child... I have investigated and found that an average child carries strapped to his back, like a pack-mule, not less than six to eight kgs of books, notebooks and other paraphernalia of modern education in addition to lunch-box and water bottle.' Thus spoke writer R.K. Narayan in the Rajya Sabha about ten years ago. However, he would have been surprised to note the contents of the schoolbag of the average child in PROBE villages — her problem is not so much an overload of books as the fact that her schoolbag contains very little — if she has one at all.

R.K. Narayan's description of the 'average child' is heavily influenced by the middle-class view. A similar bias runs through the school curriculum, alienating children of deprived backgrounds. Textbook writers assume, for example, that schools have a congenial learning environment, possess the necessary equipment, and follow the prescribed course of study. A textbook for a class 3 child reads thus: '*Tum apne vidyalaya mein hhasha, ganit, vighyan, samajik adhyayan, kala aur hast-shilp sikhte ho* (you study language, mathematics, science, social studies, and art and craft at your school).' In another lesson, a parent is escorted around the 'spotless, sparkling school' by the principal, and passes the 'school library' on his way around the school. Both texts are way off the mark in these dilapidated, often dirty, under-equipped village schools where even the three Rs are not adequately taught. Similarly, social studies textbooks in more than one state routinely tell the child to look at his atlas or at the globe and charts. The science texts describe experiments involving simple equipment like a hand lens, a bell jar, a stove, a funnel, etc. For these little children, all these instructions are in the realm of fantasy.

## 6.2. Far from the Realities of Life

We now turn to a typical school in a fairly remote village in Madhya Pradesh, where there are only two teachers for all five classes. In this area, an average government school is a dismal structure, crammed with children of all ages huddled together, squatting on the bare uneven floor in passive postures. Sounds emanating from this institution are normally in the form of a cacophonous chorus when, made to chant their mantras, children determinedly shout their guts out almost in a cathartic release. In a functioning classroom there are rarely any normal happy sounds — of joyous laughter, creative composition, active participation, excited discovery, curious questioning, music or poetry. Do we still wonder why such structures, and the ambience within them, do not allow much learning to happen?

Children of classes 1-3 are all sitting huddled in the verandah, while the other two classes sit inside the dark and dingy room. The teacher seems earnest, but can barely manage to 'police' the large heterogeneous group, made up of children aged anywhere between four and ten years. In the name of 'teaching', he depends entirely on the textbook, some-

*Below : Very young children are often the most neglected and confused.*



ANAL SHAH



times reading out aloud and at other times asking children to copy from it. Unable to cope with three classes at one time, and frustrated by the adverse work environment, he adopts the principle of least action.

Since the notion of 'teaching' in our education system is reduced to 'giving information', the teacher is often constrained to perform accordingly. The act of teaching is normally limited to a set of actions which include asking children to read on their own, making one child read out aloud, sometimes writing a few words on the board, or dictating 'correct' answers to questions given in the book. This is how teachers themselves were taught, even by their best teachers, and this is what they perceive to be expected of them. In this scenario the textbook (or the syllabus) is the Bible, and the nature of the information it contains largely shapes classroom transactions. Teachers are often reluctant to put much effort into teaching, but textbooks also discourage any other activity, even though they may pretend to be activity-centred. For instance, children are asked to observe the 'picture' of an object, rather than to go out and look at the 'real' thing, be it a common sparrow or the leaf of a plant. As *Learning without Burden* observed:

Over the recent years, some textbooks have adopted the vocabulary of observation and exploration,... but even here virtually all commands for observation conclude with statements about what will be seen, thereby making it unnecessary to actually perform any activity.

Let us for a moment look at what children of class 3 in this village school are reading, and imagine what else an average teacher would do in the given situation. The lesson this time, 'Aao Sikhien' (from the SCERT book *Bhasha Bharti*, 1996), is basically a terse list of dos and don'ts about traffic rules and symbols:

*Vaahan chalaate samay mudne se pehle haath se ishara karein.*  
(While driving a vehicle indicate with your hand before turning.)

*Ambulance, police ya fire brigade ki gadi ko pehle jane dein.*  
(Allow the ambulance, police or fire brigade to proceed first.)

*Bachche, boodhe evam apahij ko rasta paar karne mein madad karein.*  
(Help children, the old and the handicapped while crossing the road.)

This last sentence is almost hilarious, and epitomizes how easily textbook writers forget the age, capacities, interests and concerns of the learners. Text clearly meant for adult drivers has been imposed on young children (most of them living in rural areas with no roads, hospitals or fire brigades!), ostensibly in response to a central norm (MLL 1.3.4) that traffic rules must be 'taught' in class 3. In the same unthinking manner these children will be made to regurgitate these mantras in tests and examinations, through questions such as:

*Sadak paar karte samay kin-kin logon ki madad karni chahiye?*  
(Who all need to be helped while crossing a road?)

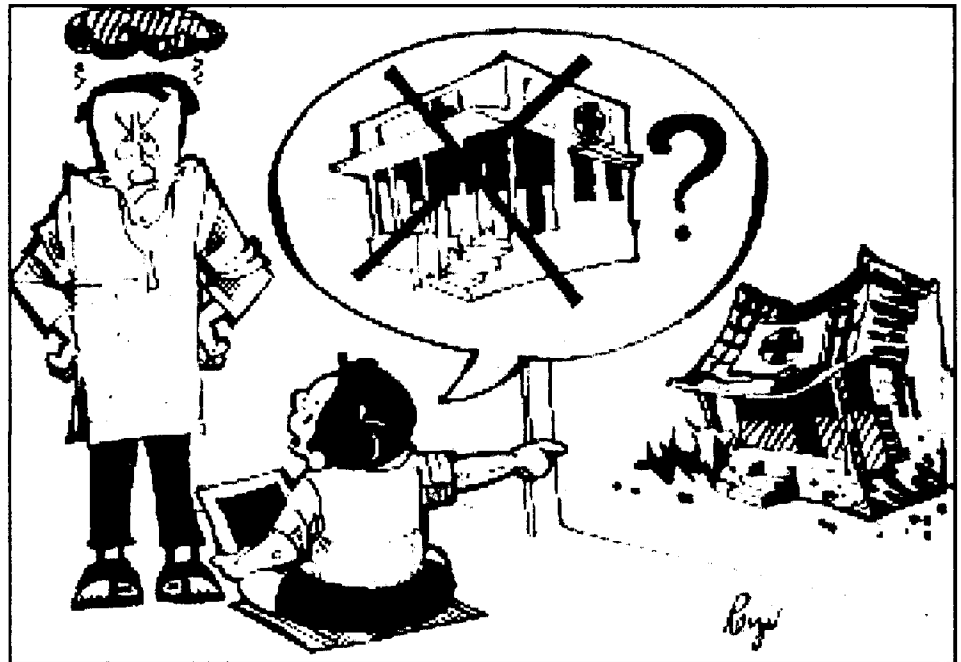
*Chauraha paar karte samay kin-kin baaton ka dhyan rakhna chahiye?*  
(What needs to be kept in mind while at the crossing?)

*Hamein horn kahan-kahan nahin bajaana chahiye?*  
(Where should we avoid blowing the horn?)

*Below : Sharp focus needed: textbook writers tend to forget the age, interests and concerns of the learner.*



SONDEEP SHANKAR



Primary-school textbooks also waste much space in trivial or futile preaching and moralizing. There is an implicit bias of curriculum makers and book writers that the village poor are 'ignorant and illiterate' and therefore need to be told how to conduct their lives 'properly'. In addition, textbooks go out of their way to present over-idealized situations — of democratic panchayats, benevolent employers, good neighbours, functioning hospitals and efficient governments. Simplistic generalizations are made and almost surreal situations are constructed, whereas natural conflicts and complexities of life are strictly avoided, even if a majority of our rural children actually live such lives and are deeply conscious of its realities. It is, rather, the protected urban middle-class child who may not know the real face of a *sarpanch*, the exploitative authority of a contractor, or the intricacies of taking loans from a money-lender. It is again the same protected child who has probably never observed a fly or a lizard, whereas his village counterpart would not need to look at 'pictures' to tell how many legs a spider has, or how to identify frogs' eggs, and may be far more knowledgeable about the natural world. However the way school knowledge is structured and articulated, it never allows the rural child to have an edge over the 'privileged' urban ones.

Rural children find false platitudes about their own lives routinely doled out as absolute 'truths', with no chance of critically analysing or questioning such statements. Children know very well that these lessons are not true, but are forced to passively accept them and even repeat them as truths. For instance, the same class-3 textbook mentioned above contains separate chapters to describe (or rather eulogize) each of the following:

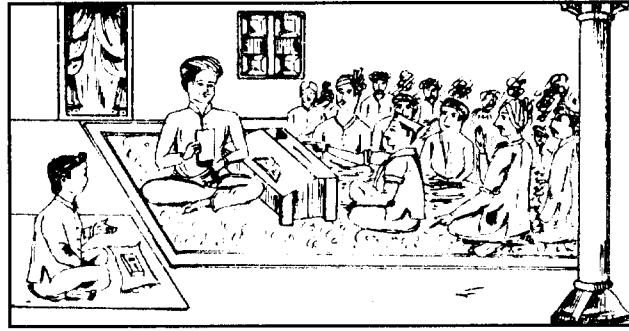
- A village primary health centre with a doctor, a nurse and a compounder, etc.
- A factory owner who readily agrees to the workers' demand for equal wages for men and women, when informed that the government has passed laws to ensure this.
- A village panchayat which discusses development plans for the '*gramin rozgar karyakram*' (rural employment programme) and proposes to open a crèche for women agricultural workers.
- A woman who takes her child to the hospital for a vaccination and convinces her neighbour to follow suit.
- A diligent postman who delivers mail through rain and rough weather.
- A tribal leader who rebelled against the British, and whose village has been declared a 'model' village by the State government in his honour.

**'Remote' facts versus 'real' fiction:**

Two versions of the panchayat in Social Studies textbooks.

Right: A typical textbook in PROBE villages. This information-dense, stereotyped account would not attract the 8-9 year olds for whom it is meant. The page, too, is packed with print and the illustration is stylized.

Below: An excerpt from an Eklavya text — 'Paise jutane mein deri (delay in getting funds)'. Eklavya uses a real-life situation faced by a panchayat member to develop the topic. The narrative style is engaging and the illustration is realistic.

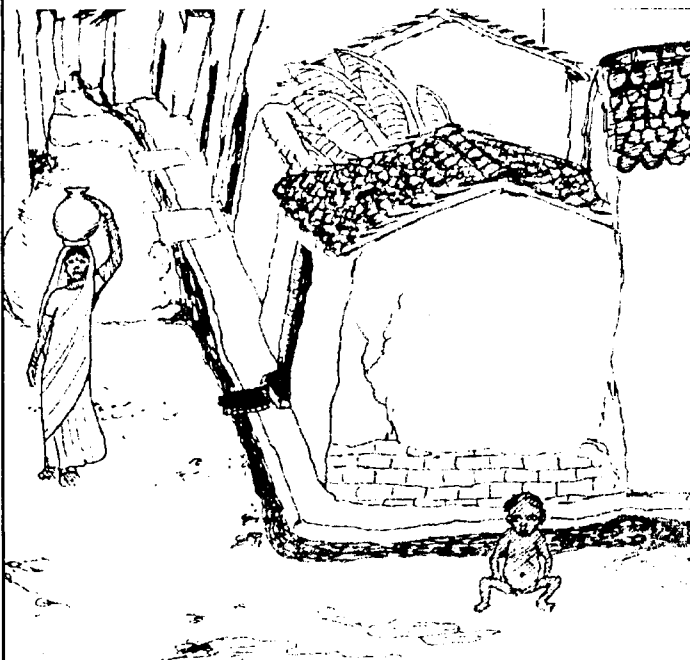


**ग्राम पंचायत**—ग्राम पंचायत में स्थानीय लोगों से चुने गये व्यक्ति काम करते हैं। पंचायत के चुनाव में हर गांव को वार्डों में बांटा जाता है। प्रत्येक वार्ड के लोग एक-एक व्यक्ति को चुनते हैं। वह व्यक्ति वार्ड-पंच कहलाता है। वह व्यक्ति पंचायत का सदस्य होता है। गांव के सारे मतदाता मिलकर एक सरपंच का चुनाव करते हैं। सरपंच पंचायत का मुखिया होता है। ग्राम पंचायत में महिला, अनुसूचित जनजाति और अनुसूचित जाति के सदस्यों का होना जरूरी होता है। पंच, सरपंच मिलकर ग्राम में विकास का काम करते हैं। कई पंचायतों को मिलाकर पंचायत समिति बनाई जाती है। पंचायत-समिति इनको मदद करती है। पंचायत समिति की मदद के लिए जिले में जिला परिषद् होती है।

## ग्राम-पंचायत के काम में मुश्किल

### पैसे जुटाने में देरी

कनियाखेड़ी ग्राम-पंचायत की उस बैठक के बाद कई महीने बीत गए। हर महीने तिजिया बैठक में जाती। घासीटोला के हैंडपंप के पैसे के बारे में पूछताछ करती। उसे बताया गया कि



मार्च में जब सरकार को अगले साल के कामों की योजना भेजेंगे तो उसी में हैंडपंप के लिए भी पैसे मांगेंगे। साल भर के पैसे के साथ ही सरकार से हैंडपंप का पैसा मिलेगा।

सितम्बर के महीने में कनियाखेड़ी ग्राम-पंचायत को जनपद पंचायत से सरकारी पैसे मिले। इनमें घासीटोला के हैंडपंप के पैसे भी थे। तिजिया ने अक्टूबर की बैठक में सरपंच से पैसे मांगे ताकि हैंडपंप का काम शुरू हो जाए। एक वार्ड के पंच रामदीन ने कहा, "तिजिया बाई तुम्हें ये सब काम करवाने में मुश्किल होगी। शहर से ठेकेदार लाना होगा। मैं शहर जाता रहता हूँ, मैं ये काम करवा दूंगा।" तिजिया रामदीन की बात मान गई।

दो-तीन महीने हो गए पर हैंडपंप का काम शुरू नहीं हुआ। जब भी तिजिया रामदीन से इस के बारे में पूछती, वह कुछ बहाना बना देता।



## एक दीवाली ऐसी भी .....

गुड्डी आज ही मामाजी के यहाँ से बीस दिन की मेहमानी करके लौटी। उसके आते ही राजू ने बताया शुरू कर दिया कि उसने दीवाली के दिन कितने पटाखे फोड़े, कितनी फुलझड़ी जलाई। कैसे देर रात तक चाचा के साथ एटम बम फोड़े। गुड्डी बोली — ठीक है, तुमने तो एक रात दीवाली मनाई होगी, हम तो पूरे पन्द्रह दिनों की दीवाली मनाकर आ रहे हैं।

वो कैसे ?

जहाँ मैं गई थी न, वहाँ आसपास के सभी गाँव के लोग सारा काम तो हमारी तरह ही करते हैं। यानी घरों की साफ-सफाई, आँगन छावना, लीपना वगैरह। पर हर गाँव दीवाली अलग-अलग दिन मनाता है। दीवाली के कुछ दिनों पहले आसपास के गाँव के बुजुर्ग लोग आपस में सलाह कर लेते हैं। किस गाँव में किस दिन दीवाली होगी। बस फिर जिस दिन जिस गाँव की दीवाली हुई आसपास के सभी लोग वहाँ अपने रिश्तेदारों के पास दीवाली मनाने जाते हैं। दीवाली की रात सभी लोग गाँव के बाहर इकट्ठा होते हैं। सारी रात ढोल बजाकर नाचना गाना होता है। पटाखे फोड़ते हैं।

अगले दिन चार बजे रात से लोग अपने अपने जानवरों को रंगते हैं। गाय, बैल, भैंस, बौदा, बकरी और इनके बच्चों को भी। उन्हें सजाने के लिए कठीला और मुरंगा बांधा जाता है। फिर गाँव के सभी जानवर एक जगह इकट्ठे किए जाते हैं। उनके आसपास पटाखे फोड़कर उन्हें दौड़ाते हैं। ठाटिया जिनके पशु चराता है उनके घर जाकर दीवार पर मांझना बनाता है। उनसे कपड़े और खाना लेता है...

Right : A different Diwali.

The Eklavya text describes Diwali in rural Madhya Pradesh — and retains sensitivity to urban children.

Below : This style is more common in the textbooks in PROBE states. It shows the commercialized Diwali of urban India.



The simplistic script and stereotyped characters are familiar, not very different from government-sponsored posters. Often these stereotypes have less to do with any conscious design to distort than with the simplistic notions harboured by urban middle-class people about rural life.

Policy-makers and textbook writers are seriously hampered by their limited view of deeper social issues. Trained by the same education system, and conditioned by the absence of criticality in the 'official' culture of work, they all end up with similar scripts and crudely cloned characters. In

their agenda for school there seem to be no stories or even poems without a conspicuous or trite moral.

Primary-science textbooks are packed with information about personal hygiene and cleanliness, presented in a moral-

## SOCIAL CLASS IN THE CLASSROOM

In a class-ridden society, children internalize class distinctions in the classroom. The main source of this 'construction of class' is the teacher. Curriculum too is important. By negating working-class experience and glorifying values and ideals which lie outside the world of working-class children, both lead the children to see themselves as aliens in the world projected by the school. This is one insight from a detailed study of the functioning of a school for working-class children located in Tughlakabad near Delhi. Most of the pupils belong to families working in the stone quarries in the area.

Let us examine the role of the teachers first. Of the twelve permanent teachers, none belonged to the lower castes. Even those who were from modest economic backgrounds did not see themselves as belonging to that stratum after becoming teachers. All the teachers persistently complained of the problems in their pupils' homes: domestic violence, alcoholism, illiteracy of mothers, parental apathy, and so on.

Teachers blamed the home environment but took no responsibility as educators. Some were alienated from the work, others disillusioned. 'Teacher training tells us nothing about the reality of our school,' said one of the more conscientious teachers. 'All teaching methods I knew have failed with these children. The only viable method I know is indiscriminate thrashing.' Asked to elaborate on the efficacy of his thrashing 'method', he confessed that beating did not help, but that he used it to prevent children from disturbing his personal work. Another teacher felt that free uniforms and textbooks were a waste when parents had no tradition of cleanliness and book care. This young teacher felt it was impossible to communicate with these children of uncouth parents. 'Teaching these children makes no difference,' sighed another teacher. 'I don't teach my pupils for more than two hours. I have to do a lot of my own work and go about my own business.'

Teachers freely used the children as personal helpers, for jobs like fetching water and obtaining cigarettes or *paan* from the local market. It was taken for granted that these were children of menial workers and were supposed to do such work at home and at school. Teachers themselves were

ever welcoming of any diversion from their teaching work. When the children failed, they attributed the failure to the inadequacies of the pupils and not to the inadequacies of the surrounding society or the curriculum. It was a classic case of 'blaming the victim'.

Turning to the curriculum, its content was an arbitrary cultural imposition. The gulf between the high and the low was naturalized in the textbooks, e.g. using the image of honey bees (*shahad ki makkhiyan*) and other analogies from the animal kingdom. The biographies of Madame Curie, Albert Schweitzer, Gautama Buddha, Confucius and so on all conveyed the superiority of intellectual labour over manual labour. At best they could inspire awe in these children born and brought up to do manual tasks; at worst they could instil in them a feeling of inadequacy. Stories in the textbook emphasized the power of the mind, the ultimate magic which could turn a pauper into a king. The curriculum carried the symbols of the socially-dominant groups, ignoring other symbols — the knowledge offered was allegedly valuable for all. Often enough, the realities of the working-class setting were naturalized and depoliticized, by either eulogizing or glorifying existing realities. The curriculum thus amounted to an organized symbolic aggression on the pupils, pressing them to internalize their subservient position in society. The discouragement they felt was but natural.

Textbooks were oblivious of real-life contradictions. The smaller children had a lesson on animals in the zoo, where the animals had hygienic surroundings and were protected from various diseases and vitamin deficiencies. Sick animals had caring hospital doctors. The facilities at the zoo presented a glaring contrast with the conditions at the quarry. The teachers were not even remotely aware of the chasm between the text and its context.

It should be mentioned, however, that the teacher and the curriculum are mere actors in the theatre of class construction. The master script of that construction derives from the class relations obtaining outside the classroom.

Mohammad Talib.

istic manner. However, when it is suggested that real-life stories about children's everyday problems such as lice or scabies, and safe practical ways to deal with them, be included, 'experts' frown disgustedly and complain that the mere mention of such 'filthy' topics makes them feel itchy! Lice are very common in young children and it has been found that poor mothers frequently use cheap insecticides on children's heads. However, the urgency of this problem and the need to tackle it sensitively in the classroom does

not move our urban middle-class experts. The middle-class bias is visible through most of what is taught and also the way it is taught. For instance, there is always a topic on 'types of houses', in which the concrete bungalow, the semi-pacca house and the *jhuggi* are mechanically presented as given 'types', as if such natural scientific categories existed. A 'good' house is always one with a separate kitchen, toilets, windows, electricity, etc., and millions of children who live in conditions that do not conform to

these norms are immediately alienated, and signalled that their lifestyle is 'bad'.

In the case of tribal children this alienation is severe, since their very existence and identity is portrayed ambiguously and problematically. Moreover, teachers themselves are often deeply conditioned by social biases against tribal people, and reinforce these biases in the classroom. Teachers often refer to them through stereotypes, such as 'people engaged in drinking and dancing, highly superstitious, and not interested in education'. In a textbook for class 6, questions about 'where in the State are tigers found?' were framed in exactly the same way as 'where are tribals found? (*adivasi kahan paaye jate hain?*)'. No effort was made to even semantically differentiate between 'where people are *found*' and 'where people *live*'. No tribal children, and no tribal names, ever appear in their textbooks. In fact, teachers are always 'correcting' their names, since they find them odd or consider those to be distorted versions of 'proper' sanskritized names. Textbooks routinely carry a chapter on 'Our State' (*Hamara Pradesh*), which mentions that 'tribal and backward persons (*pichhade log*) inhabit our state in large numbers'. One can only imagine what this does to the self-image of tribal and so-called 'backward' children, and what messages it gives to the others.

The issue of language is crucial and also quite complicated. While language is central to the very identity of a person, and most tribal communities would want to preserve it as an integral part of their culture, they are also acutely aware of the survival value of the dominant language. Moreover, tribals who regularly transact with non-tribals are often bilingual. A sound approach is to begin with the mother tongue, in this case the specific tribal dialect, using the Devnagari script (or the prevalent script of the region) to write what the child already knows as a spoken language. The child can continue to learn bilingually, and gradually switch to Hindi (or the dominant regional language), though not taught in its present sanskritized form, which inhibits the learning capabilities of all children. In practice, however, Hindi is often imposed from the very beginning.

## OF TORN TEXTS AND DIFFICULT ONES

When textbooks are the only books a child possesses, as is often the case in the PROBE villages, these texts become the child's only windows to the world of learning. Unfortunately, a glance at textbooks available to PROBE children shows that these windows are often blurred or cloudy in more than one sense.

Most textbooks used in the sample schools were printed on coarse paper which crumbled easily. Secondly, the covers were of thin paper (i.e. the books had no binding). Battered texts were, therefore, a common sight. The pages were small, and crowded with tiny print. Illustrations were few and unclear. No space could be spared for highlighting important points, or for review notes at the end of a chapter. In the set we retained for examination, 10-15 pages were blurred in some textbooks, in a few others *only 10-15 pages were legible*. In one state, this problem applied to all classes, subjects, and even printing presses.

An even more serious problem is that children continue to be bombarded with excessive information. For the disadvantaged child, another alienating factor is the heavy middle-class bias of most textbooks.

In no state were textbooks found to be satisfactory along broad parameters of content, language, relevance and presentation. They were invariably faulty on one or more counts.

To overcome the hurdles posed by textbooks, children have been found to bypass them altogether with the active guidance of the teachers. Learning then gets reduced to copying questions and answers from the *kunji*, and committing them to memory.

Some state governments are showing signs of openness to innovation and change. For instance, the language used in textbooks does seem to be in a state of transition towards simpler idiom. But on the whole textbook writers continue to feel a great urge to cram the textbooks with an awesome load of vocabulary, concepts and information. And sensitivity to children in general, and disadvantaged children in particular, is sorely lacking.

## 6.3. Information Invasion

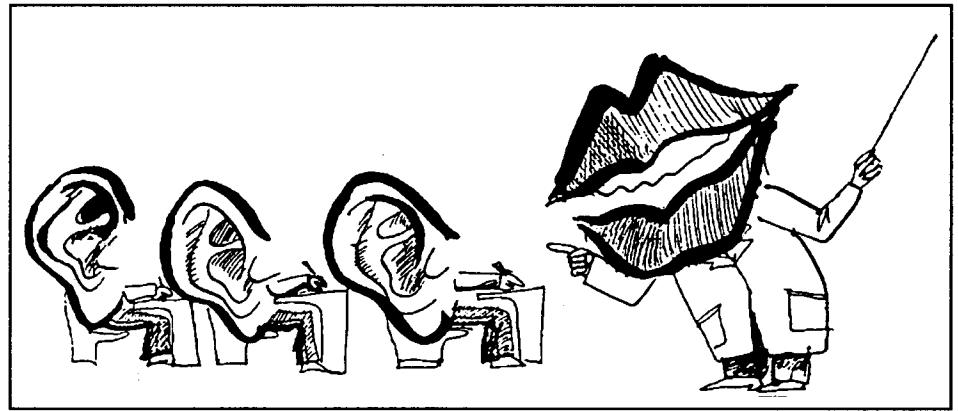
Curriculum-makers are beset with the misguided notion of some global 'knowledge explosion', and constantly argue that children must 'catch up' with it. It is believed that a backward country like India must strive to match the industrialized countries, where knowledge is fast expanding, compelling our children to learn a lot more than they used to do. When it is pointed out that children in so-called developed countries bear a *lesser* 'burden' of information and concepts (European children, for instance, learn concepts of valency or chemical equations much later than their Indian counterparts), the argument is turned around to say 'they can now afford to go slow'.

The myth of the 'knowledge explosion' is based on a confusion between knowledge and information. While it is true that this century has seen an explosion of technologies that enhance human capacity to increase its database of facts, the range of concepts and theories that assist in the organization and understanding of facts does not grow very fast. A crucial aim of

*Passive postures: natural for schools, unnatural for the child.*



ANAL SHAH



DANGER SCHOOL

children's education should be to promote concept-formation and enhance the capacity for theory-building. All children are natural theory-makers, and from much before they go to school they begin to construct their own theories and explanations for the world they observe. Learning in childhood is not a process of accumulating or storing information about different topics, but the ability to apply the understanding of one phenomenon to others. Observation, categorization and generalizations are natural skills with which a baby first responds to her environment and also learns to communicate through language. However, our school system does not allow for the child's mind and personality to develop naturally, and most often prevents her from using most of her faculties. Moreover, it doles out information in a strictly linear pattern, e.g. we first teach 1-10, then 20-30, and so on; or, say, the syllabus includes 'Our locality' in class 1, 'Our district' in class 3, 'Our state' in class 4, and 'Our country and the world' in class 5. The school system also treats knowledge as disjointed fragments of information, e.g. teaching 'Parts and properties of plants' in class 2, 'The function of leaves and photosynthesis' in class 3, 'The seed-flower-fruit cycle' in class 5, etc. By contrast, the natural learning process in children is far from linear, and the way they process information about the world they live in is far more holistic and integrated.

These considerations, however, are ignored by our 'experts', most of whom have no serious experience of working with children and little understanding of their learning strategies. After the 1986 National Policy on Education, the National Council of Educational Research

and Training (NCERT) had undertaken a major syllabus revision to try to make curricula child-centred. The class 3 textbook *Exploring Environment* (prepared as part of the revision process) has the merit of being printed in four colours, unlike most other textbooks used in government schools across the country. However, it remains far from exploratory, and only feigns to follow an activity-based approach. Despite the numerous questions that intersperse the text, the language remains highly didactic and the content essentially incomprehensible. Excerpts from the chapter on 'Weather':

When water evaporates it changes from liquid into water vapour. Water vapour is the gaseous form of water. Wet things dry when the water in them becomes water vapour and moves into the atmosphere. You cannot see water evaporating into water vapour. Water vapour exists in the form of very tiny particles.

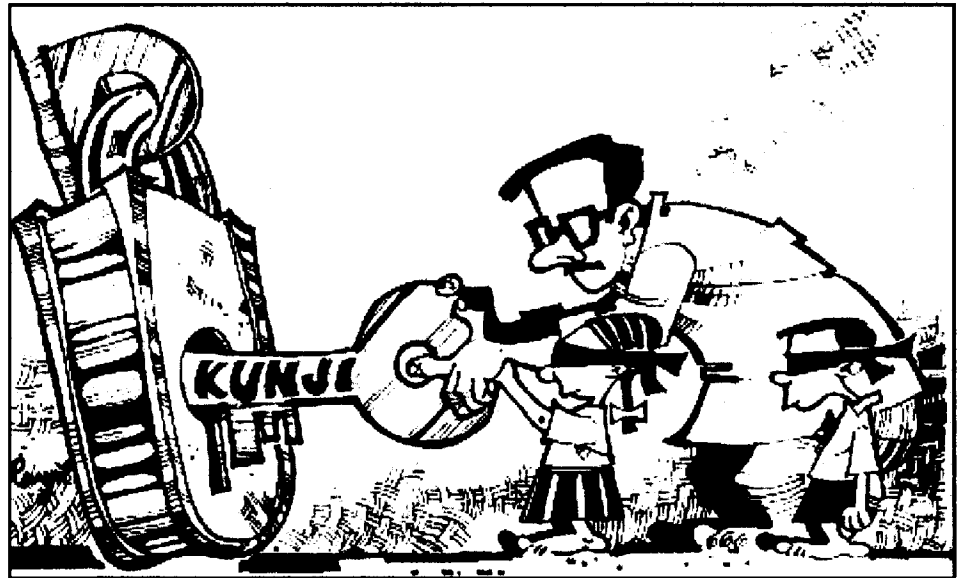
We notice that most of these sentences do not offer any real explanations. They are only statements which go round in circles, as tautologies. If a child asks, 'But what *is* water vapour?', she gets the answer, 'Water vapour is the gaseous form of water!' Naturally the child soon stops trying to make sense of what is being 'taught' at school and falls in line with what is expected, namely, only to unthinkingly repeat what has been told. The child's natural curiosity and propensity to constantly ask questions of 'why' and 'how', are all silenced by the school environment and she quietly conforms to the role of being at best a passive listener.



At the time of the examinations, she is hailed as a 'good student' only if she somehow manages to faithfully reproduce these mantras, when asked the following questions (from the same textbook):

- State the difference between a liquid and a gas.
- Liquids and gases take the \_\_\_\_\_ of the container.
- Name two uses each of liquids, solids and gases.
- How does water vapour in the atmosphere get condensed?

Examinations become the major referral system, and ultimately shape the accepted patterns of teaching, textbook writing and classroom interaction. If tests and examination questions expect children to memorize information and give answers in fixed predetermined phrases, irrespective of whether they understand them or not, there is little hope of changing the ambience of the classroom. In fact, in a significant number of schools, teachers no longer insist on textbooks, but resort only to 'guidebooks'. These *kunjis* are written specifically as a 'key' to somehow turn the overbearing locks of the examinations, and extract some precious marks from the elusive kitty. The ability to think, understand, express in one's own words, to explore or to experiment, to use logical reasoning, to observe carefully, etc., are given no value or place in the



school because ultimately they are not evaluated in any way.

The information invasion is all the more taxing given the archaic way in which language (the basic foundation of all school learning) is taught in many schools. Language teaching in the earliest classes continues to mechanically focus on alphabets, and even the words chosen are often out of any living context for the child. The nature of the text is formal, boring and far removed from the spoken form. Language teaching makes

no effort to include colloquial forms from different dialects and assumes that children will learn to communicate only through repetition or rote memorization. This is certainly not how children learn a language, and unless they are made to actively engage with words and meanings, to play with them, they remain diffident to cope with any further demands of the curriculum. Despite the importance of the mother tongue for early instruction, our vernacular textbooks effectively prove to be speaking a 'foreign' language for the majority of children.

In most private schools which claim to be 'English medium', children are further burdened with an even more alien language, which is not taught as it should be, namely, as a 'second language', but is the medium for all the content they must grapple with. Normally young children can quite easily learn to speak many languages at the same time, if they are provided with a stimulating environment to use them naturally and fearlessly. However, for most of our children there are very few natural 'learning environments' to listen to or speak in English, either at home or outside. Moreover, the school does not provide a friendly or stimulating 'learning' environment for the language. On the contrary, many private schools unnaturally force a repressive regimen to ensure that children speak *only* in English, even informally between friends. Some are

अपनी पाठ्य पुस्तक 'बाल  
भारती' से किसी कविता की  
छः पंक्तियां लिखिए।

विलोम शब्द लिखो —

पर्यायवाची शब्द लिखिये —

मुहावरों के अर्थ लिखो —

अर्थ लिखकर वाक्य बनाओ —

## HOW LANGUAGE IS TAUGHT

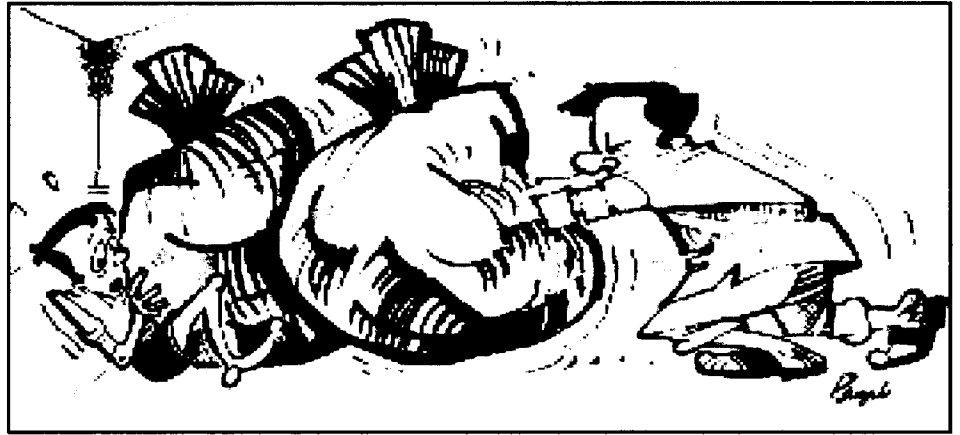
These questions from a language examination paper for class 5 are a good indication of the artificial way in which language is taught in most schools. The children are asked here to write 6 lines of a poem which they have memorized, and to give the meanings, the opposites, synonyms etc. of words / phrases from lessons in their texts or even from word-lists. Language teaching is not focused on activities which develop skill in using language, but on correct spelling, neat writing, and rote memorization.

known to have gone so far as to punish children for violating this rule, i.e. for having spoken to a friend in their mother tongue!

## 6.4. MLLs: Meaningless Levels of Learning

The current trend towards centralized norms of learning and uniform testing criteria has taken the confusion between information and learning one step further. The recent formulation of 'Minimum Levels of Learning' (MLLs) as national criteria to evaluate pupil achievements is part of this centralizing trend. Despite the stated aims to 'lighten the curriculum of its textual load and the burden of memorizing unnecessary and irrelevant facts', and to ensure 'the acquisition of basic competencies and skills' (*Minimum Levels of Learning at Primary Stage*, NCERT, 1991), the MLLs have only added to the burden of teaching and learning. The slogan of 'competency-based learning' has made little difference to curricula and textbooks, which have religiously followed the unrealistic list of 'contents', only flimsily disguised as 'competencies'. The sacred MLL code has dominated all decisions and actions in school education, right down to what happens in the classroom. In fact, we can see the roots of many classroom problems discussed earlier staring directly at us through the pages of these codes. While these national norms and their underlying philosophy raise many contentious issues, this section focuses on the stated expectations from children and the process adopted to ensure that they are met.

Some textbook committees now assign chapters to be written on given 'MLL codes'. For instance, someone is asked to write a chapter on '1.5.8', which is nothing but the 'competency' statement (for class 5) 'Calculates lowest common multiple of 2 or 3 numbers each of which do not exceed 10'. Another chapter is written on '1.4.8' (for class 4), which says 'Demonstrates understanding of prime numbers up to 50', or on '8.4' (also class 4), 'The usefulness of living things for



man'. Instead of trying to create chapters around interesting themes, which allow for many different competencies and skills to be creatively enhanced, we seem to have slipped deeper into a singularly reductionist framework.

At school, MLLs which are impossible to 'cover' in class get mindlessly converted into homework. Recently the mother of a child studying in class 4 of Kendriya Vidyalaya, at IIT Mumbai, was horrified to find that her daughter had been asked to 'write all number names up to 10,000' as homework during the week-long vacation. One shudders to think what would happen if teachers were tempted to use the same approach to fulfil MLL statement 1.5.2 — 'Writes number names up to 1,00,00,000 (one crore)'. (A quick estimate suggests that a person counting non-stop would take over 100 days just to recite these numbers aloud!)

The MLLs for Environmental Studies are particularly daunting. Having realized the futility of trying to camouflage these in terms of 'competencies', the Committee forged ahead unabashedly, codifying the content in an interminable list of statements such as: 1.1.4 'Practises personal cleanliness including toilet habits'; 2.5.1 'Understands relationship between the Central, State and local-self governments'; 5.5 'Our struggle for freedom'; 5.4 'Progress of man from early times to the present age'; 8.5.3 'Knows the present schemes (a few) to increase and improve forest cover, cleaning rivers, tanks and such others, e.g. the Ganga.'; 9.5 'Energy and work'; 10.3.1 Earth-sun

relation and its consequences'; 10.5.1 'Knows about dangers from misuse of scientific knowledge, e.g. in war'; and finally (an omnipresent slogan!), 6.3 'Small family, happy family (small family norms)', followed by 6.5.5. 'Finds out increase in population according to each census since Independence and understands its implications'. If this last one provides some comic relief, others carry some alarming overtones, for instance: 1.5 'Care against persons of bad habits and bad character', and 1.5.2 'Sees relationship between crimes and bad habits and bad behaviour, e.g. alcoholism, bullying, lack of consideration for others, etc.'

Note that the second digit in the code signifies the class in which a given MLL has to be achieved, though it does not really matter, since most of these 'topics' cannot ever be really 'learned' at these ages. For instance, how is a child of class 3 expected to: (4.3.4) 'Know about important physical features, climate, vegetation, crops, and industries of the district', (4.3.5) 'Trace the map of the district and show physical features, important routes, etc.', and (7.3.1) 'Understand important functions of the human body, such as digestion, respiration, blood circulation, etc.'?

The list offers more and more surprises, and continues in a similar vein, to mechanically stuff in as much content as possible in these preliminary years of schooling. Any doubts or questions raised are cursorily silenced with the grim reminder that so much *has* to be 'covered' before they reach class 6, since the

burden of the syllabus is heavy thereafter. Every attempt to revise curriculum and textbooks suffers from similar pressures 'from above', from what experts claim must necessarily be taught, by the dictates of their respective disciplines.

Once such MLLs have been spelt out at the national level, they become sacrosanct. No amount of post-hoc qualification and clarification about these being 'suggestive' guidelines, amenable to modification in different contexts, can dilute the authority of these dictates. What

children can or cannot learn becomes absolutely inconsequential.

## 6.5. Evaluation and Examinations

If classroom interaction is far from child-centred, examinations are worse still, and can be described as virtually child-threatening. The present pattern of evaluation sets the tone for all that goes wrong in the system. It also serves as a major

stumbling block in trying to change teaching methods or textbooks in the present setup. However innovative the teaching-learning materials and methodology might be, they tend to become ineffective if the pattern of evaluation of children's achievements is not changed in consonance with the child-centred philosophy. If the focus of assessment continues to be on recall and testing of memorized information, reproduced in the formalized 'un-childlike' language of the textbook, or mechanically using pre-determined algorithms to produce 'correct' answers, then very little headway is possible in the desired direction.

There is an oft-quoted example of a primary-school teacher who took unusual care of his wards and worked hard throughout the year to teach them various things in an interesting manner. However, at the time of the class-5 Board Examination he found, to his dismay, that many of them failed to perform according to the rules of the game, and were terribly disheartened to be detained in the same class for another year. To subvert the oppressive and meaningless pattern of evaluation, he worked out what he thought was an eminently fair way to conduct the examination. He wrote all the answers on the board, giving all his pupils the same opportunity to copy from it, and then differentiated them on their capacity to 'copy', creating his own version of a 'Board' examination! This, in fact, increasingly happens in many places, and we did talk with teachers (some of whom had used this method even for the class-8 Board Examination) about why they have consciously adopted such so-called 'unfair' practices. Many of them say this is done out of helpless 'compulsion', since they have found that even with the best effort they cannot ensure adequate pass percentages. When children come to them at the last stage, they find them critically 'weak' in all their basic learning, and cannot then significantly improve the situation. Moreover, the dismally low pass percentage of around 5-10 per cent in the school can demoralize not just the teachers but also the younger children, still striving to make it when their turn comes. So mass copying seems the only way for them to cope with an

### ANTI-COPYING ACTS

If children need to copy answers from the Board in order to pass at class-5 level, what will be their fate at class-10 level, if they reach that stage? The answers are glimpsed in the abnormally low pass percentage at class-10 level. They can also be seen in the curious legal measures adopted in at least two PROBE states to curb the organized use of 'unfair means'.

In Uttar Pradesh, according to a *Times of India* report (19 March 1998) the state government recently felt compelled to add further modifications to an anti-copying ordinance passed in 1992. The aim was to check the use of unfair means in all examinations including those conducted by the Madhyamik Shiksha Parishad (which handles secondary school examinations in U.P.). According to this report the Chief Minister says that the 'copying syndicate had become so powerful that mass copying had become an industry and examination centres were taken up on contract'.

Bihar, too, has taken a tough stand against the use of unfair means. A report (*Pioneer*, 7 June 1996) describes another facet of this problem: the tough stand taken by the government to prevent cheating had resulted in plummeting pass percentages. The reporter is appalled to recall that

the students pleaded and even fought with the authorities to allow *chori* for at least once more and go strict afterwards. When the administration acting under the instructions of the Patna High Court refused to budge, a large number of examinees opted out to wait for an easier opportunity to get through. Those who mustered the courage to sit in the examinations, scripted a pathetic tale: The previous year's pass percentage of 80 crashed to 15 with the success story of districts like Chhapra, Siwan, Gopalganj and Madhepura capsuled in an ominous expression 'two per cent'.

The report notes that the questions which this situation raises have to be answered 'by those who have ruled the state, not the students'. The crash of pass percentages indicates that the remedy would perforce have to concentrate on analysing why students are failing, and enabling them to pass honestly, rather than simply disabling the use of unfair means.

insurmountable situation, and to keep the system from collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions, while also practically ensuring that the school is not overcrowded with 'repeaters'.

Sometimes there is a fine line between different coping strategies (some officially acceptable, some not) used to ensure better pass percentages in public examinations. Whether it is 'moderation' of marks, as is regularly resorted to by Boards of Examinations themselves when they systematically inflate marks to push more children across the 'passing line', or the open 'Board' examination conducted by some teachers, it is clear that the contradictions of the examination system are becoming difficult to contain. Moreover, erratic marking, erroneous yardsticks for evaluation and even wrong model answers against which answer scripts are marked, are known to play havoc with the future of children and reduce the credibility of the system even further.

The fact that examination failures and mass copying tend to be more common among disadvantaged students is often acknowledged. There is a complex relationship that links the two, and connects with the cumulative handicaps experienced by these students. Fewer teachers, minimal infrastructure, economic deprivation, uneducated parents, poor teacher motivation, high teacher absenteeism and low student achievements are all connected links of the same chain.

The examination system is actually cheating the masses by concealing the deep divisions that exist within the education system, where a poor mill-worker's child from a neglected government school is made to compete with children from well-to-do public schools. The system submerges these ugly realities under a veneer of total parity among candidates. But it hardly needs probing to find that a majority of failures belong to the disadvantaged.

*Krishna Kumar.*

The hopelessness and frustration created by the examination process, and the pressures of an increasingly competitive system, have taken a high human toll. Among disadvantaged families, children drop out of the system when it becomes impossible to cope with. Pupils from urban or middle-class backgrounds, on the other hand, are under tremendous pressure to study against all odds. They are propped up with all possible measures and tend to give up only when the psychological stress becomes unbearable. In the process, some end up with skewed personalities or as nervous wrecks. Examination anxiety has not only led to higher rates of depression among school children but also driven some of them to commit the most agonizing act of taking their own life. Every year, soon after the

## Boy fails in exam, commits suicide

NEW DELHI: A 16-year old boy who failed in the class-X Board examination reportedly killed himself.

The body of Ravinder Kumar was fished out from a canal in the Narela area of northwest Delhi on Thursday afternoon. He is learnt to have been missing since he went to check his examination results on June 15.

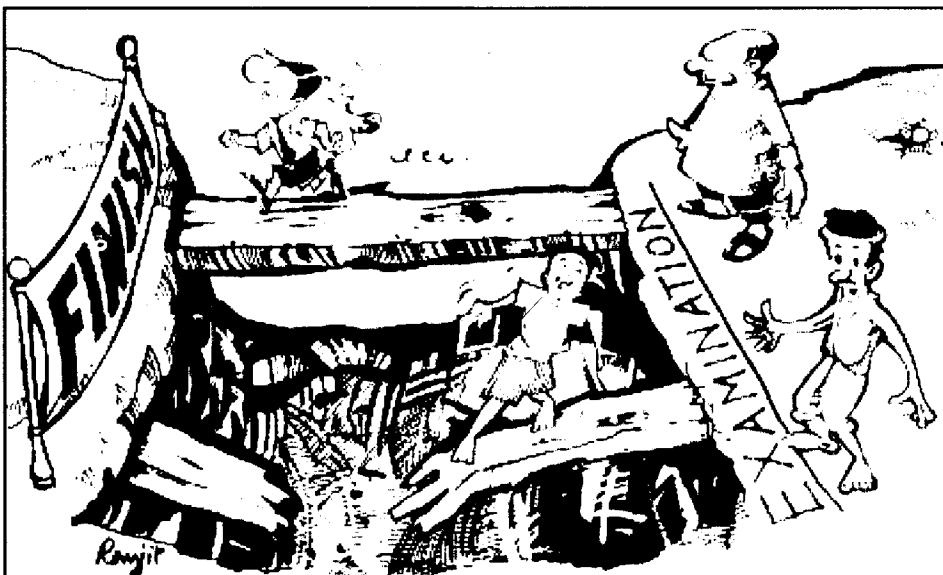
Ravinder Kumar was a resident of Pooth Khurd village in Narela, and was studying at a government school.

When he did not return till late in the evening on June 15, his family tried to search for him. The school authorities told them that the boy was upset by his results and left the school without talking to anyone.

*The Times of India*  
20 June 1998

results begin to appear, we get to read newspaper stories from across the country about children committing suicides on finding out that they have failed in the public examination.

Our pattern of examinations needs urgent reform. This step is important both in its own right as well as to prevent further corruption of the entire schooling process. Introducing 'open book' examinations at all levels could be an important starting point, since the very format of such examinations demands a change in the nature of the questions posed. Open-book Board examinations for classes 5 and 8 are already being conducted in over 800 government schools in Madhya Pradesh, in the context of innovative programmes run in collaboration with Ekiavya (see section 8.4). Practical systems of continuous evaluation need to be introduced which positively look for what a child knows rather than what she doesn't know. There is also scope for child-friendly



and non-threatening methods of evaluating children's creative talents and critical abilities, such as school tests which incorporate solving puzzles and riddles, completing a story, performing a simple experiment, etc. Conscious promotion of original responses in examinations, in children's own style and language, would show that personal understanding is valued. Such changes would require a fairly demanding reform of the entire system of examinations, but they are essential to ensure that children's motivation for learning is not killed in the bud.

## 6.6. Coping with School

In the absence of much 'learning' at school, the major preoccupation of children, teachers and parents is actually 'coping' with school. Even urban educated parents feel helpless, and often quietly shoulder the burden of tutoring children at home or arranging for private tuition, in their attempt to somehow cope with the demands of school. Some parents realize that our rigid schooling system seems to dullen their children and stifle their creativity and originality, but feel trapped with no alternative. An exceptional teacher or a privileged school may help nurture the faculties of creativity and critical enquiry among a small minority of children.

One finds only isolated examples of children who have the confidence to challenge the system. How many children would react like eleven-year old Gargi who, when asked to critically analyse her textbook, chose one section from the chapter on 'air' and sent in her expressive comments appended with two pages of her textbook?

The section on Priestley's experiment was most confusing. Mercury, red powder, heating, re-heating...Add to this Priestley, Lavoisier, from a glowing splinter, oxygen. Garbage ! It went zoom over my head.

Amongst the millions of our school children, as well as our teachers, very few

can so confidently place the blame on their books or the syllabus, and even dare to call it 'garbage'! Unfortunately, most have been conditioned to accept the curriculum as it is, and have long given up trying to make sense of it. Those who cannot keep up with this curious game end up with the disabling belief that there is something wrong with them.

This syndrome is an important part of the 'discouragement effect' discussed in chapter 3. Unable to cope with the burden of non-comprehension, many children give up. Others are withdrawn from school by their parents, who find that not much is being learnt anyway. Ironically, these parents, themselves uneducated, are often resigned to believe that their children are not 'brainy enough' for school, not realizing that the system is to blame. The system gradually 'filters' out most children, as things get harder and harder in higher grades, allowing only the socially privileged 'cream' to pass through and compete for the limited goodies waiting at the top of the pyramid. Despite general public criticism and regular suggestions of change, our curriculum-makers stick tenaciously to their conventional wisdom. There is, in fact, a strong connection between the elite view of the schooling system as a filtering process (see p.3) and the resistance of the schooling administration to curriculum reform.

The resistance, however, is not immutable. Eklavya's work in Madhya Pradesh (see section 8.4), for instance, has shown that much can be done not only to improve textbooks and simplify the curriculum but also to disseminate these improvements far and wide. In Rajasthan, too, public initiatives have led to the production of better-presented textbooks, distributed for free in most government schools. Initiatives of this kind are all the more important considering that improved teaching material can be developed by dedicated educationists at a relatively small cost, and without much delay. Further efforts in this field could relieve millions of children from a heavy burden.

# 7

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# aspects of education management



ANAL SHAH

**U**nsuspecting readers of the Department of Education's glossy reports on elementary education are unlikely to fathom the dismal state of the schooling system, described in the preceding chapters. These official reports, written in an upbeat tone, present an awe-inspiring view of a vast, sprawling education system, guided by the spirit of the Constitution. This complex marvel spreads its well-coordinated tentacles all the way from apex institutions such as NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and

Training) and NIEPA (National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration) and state-level Education Directorates to the Block Education Officers, who are in touch with every teacher. Huge nation-wide programmes like Operation Blackboard have been launched to improve all village schools. Teacher-training facilities are available in every district. Problems of low-literacy areas are being tackled with ambitious schemes like APPEP, BEP, DPEP and so on. Numerous NGOs are hard at work in cooperation with the state

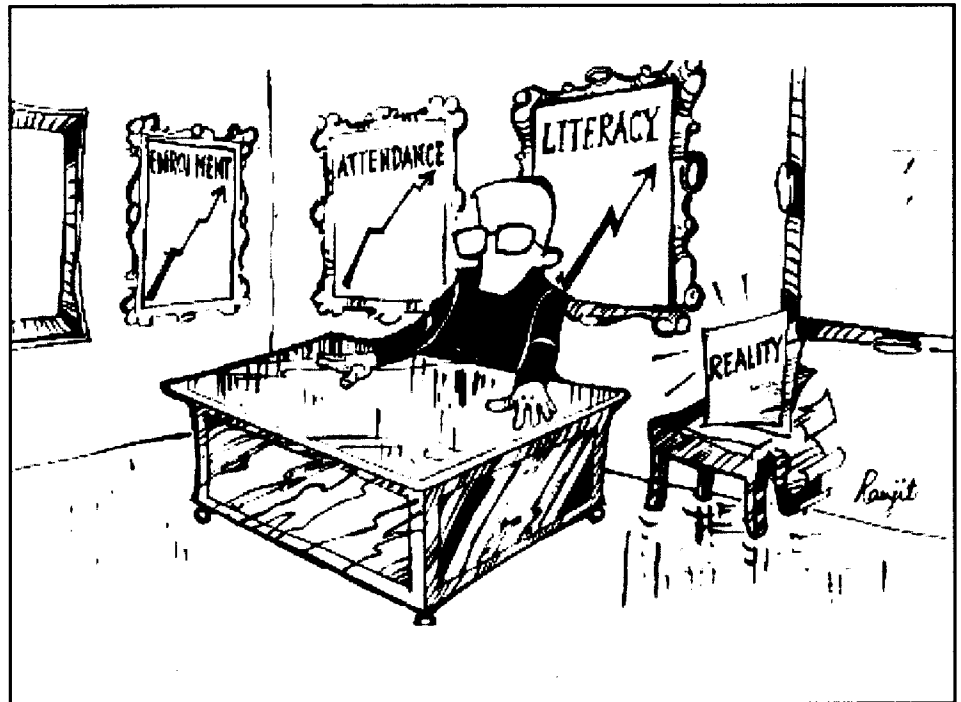
governments. Alternative education facilities such as non-formal education centres are being set up for disadvantaged children. Things are under control, and (irrespective of the publication date) universal elementary education is expected to be achieved 'within five years' or so.

The situation looks quite different from the vantage point of the PROBE villages, where the school management structure gives the impression of a rigid bureaucracy, unresponsive to the real needs of teachers and children. Classroom realities are out of focus, and the preoccupation instead is with holding the administrative fort and fulfilling official directives. While the PROBE survey was not geared to an in-depth investigation of this problem, we did get a glimpse of it from our interviews with teachers and parents, as well as from a short questionnaire sent to state-level education directorates. In this chapter, after taking a brief look at the administrative structure of the schooling system, we will present a few 'case studies' of management issues viewed from the school level.

## 7.1. The Management Structure

Elementary education, earlier a 'state subject', was brought into the concurrent list in 1976, and is now the joint responsibility of the state and central governments. The bulk of public expenditure on elementary education, however, is borne by state governments, with the central government focusing largely on supplementary schemes such as Operation Blackboard. Responsibility for these schemes is often shared with state governments, or transferred to them in due course. For instance, teachers appointed under Operation Blackboard are initially paid by the central government, and later incorporated in the state's regular teacher cadre.

To supplement the PROBE survey, we sent a short questionnaire to state-level



education directorates, focusing on management issues. The responses reveal some diversity of approaches to the universalization of elementary education in different states. But there are also problems common to most states. One of these is the lack of financial resources. Given that about 95 per cent of recurrent expenditure on elementary education is spent on salaries, little is left for items such as the maintenance of school buildings, teaching aids or pupil incentives. Another common problem is that the management structure is hopelessly overstretched. It seems that the administrative wing of the schooling system has failed to keep pace with the rapid increase in the number of schools, teachers and pupils in the last fifty years.

One consequence of this inadequacy of financial and administrative resources, according to the respondents, is a pervasive failure to resolve matters related to teachers' service conditions, as well as to ensure the smooth functioning of individual schools. Regarding the first problem, in most states three or four service assistants at the District Education Office struggle to maintain the service records of thousands of teachers (only in Kerala has the maintenance of these records been decentralized beyond the Block

level). The task is complicated by a multiplicity of pay scales for teachers with different qualifications. Transfer policies are often arbitrary, and their implementation politicized. The situation has been further complicated by the large-scale takeover of private schools in the course of the school expansion effort, and the compensation and other issues arising from this. Frustration has led many teachers to resort to litigation or agitation. Each of the PROBE states has *thousands* of cases pending in the High Court relating to teacher appointment, promotion, transfer and similar matters (in Rajasthan, for instance, there are more than 3,000 such cases). Some senior education officials complain that court cases and teachers' unions absorb most of their time and energy.

*'On an average, state educational administrators (including district education officers) spend 20 to 40 per cent of their time attending to legal wrangles.'*

*Pioneer, 7 October 1997*

## COLONIAL LEGACIES

It is easy to forget that 'modernization' as a generalized process of change in Indian society and its governance started under the auspices of colonial rule. Colonization was a pervasive process, affecting every point of interaction between the state and the citizen. Indeed, in colonized societies like India, the modern state apparatus took shape under the auspices of, and generally to fulfil the purposes of, colonial rule.

In education, colonization meant the replacement of indigenous institutions of learning, including village schools by a new structure of state-supported institutions. Though sporadic efforts were made to incorporate the older systems into the new one, ultimately the older systems were destroyed or, in some cases, marginalized. This process had several consequences. One was to reinforce the association which already existed in the public mind, between modern education and foreign rule. Another was to dry up the moral and financial support of the community for the local teacher and his efforts. Change in the teacher's status in the community and the perception of his role had to do with changes in the curriculum too. The new curriculum had no resonance of indigenous traditions of knowledge and learning. Indeed, the new curriculum exuded hostility towards folklore and the heritage of arts and crafts. School knowledge was now magically encapsulated in a single source — the officially prescribed textbook.

The teacher lost his cultural membership of the village community, but even as a state functionary — his new identity — he had a low status and hardly any power in the context of his own professional activity. Poorly paid, he represented the lowest rung in the hierarchy of the Department of Education. Insecure, cynical, and professionally ill-equipped, the teacher became a stickler after rules, as an eminent British officer and writer, Arthur Mayhew pointed out in a book published in 1926. Mayhew linked the intellectually unstimulating school ethos with the service conditions and the professional personality of the teacher. The teacher's subordinate status also explains his behaviour at the time of inspection. An inspecting official's visit to this day is an occasion to please the official by presenting the children and the school in the best possible light, rather than to draw the official's attention towards deficient facilities and problems. The weak status accorded to the teacher under

colonial rule extended to the perception of the training required for becoming a teacher. Teacher training did not establish linkage with the university system till well after independence, and still remains a state-run activity as far as primary education is concerned, barring just one exception.

Despite the popular view that modern education was culturally alienating, colonial rule witnessed a consistent demand for expansion of educational facilities, especially for college-level enrolment. The demand was articulated, in most cases, by the elite strata of society whose members saw and used education as a means of consolidating their dominance under the emerging political economy. While illiteracy persisted in the larger society, higher education expanded at a rapid rate and continued to do so after independence. However, higher education also remained largely focused on the prescribed syllabi, textbooks and guides. For the overwhelming majority of college entrants, the aim of instruction and study was to avoid failure in the annual examination. Fear of examination failure became a dominant feature of the culture of education, its influence extending all the way to the primary school. Thus, while higher education gained precedence in terms of public demand and government policy, its character and influence on other levels of education were in keeping with the culture of colonialism.

Intellectual and cultural subordination, and dissociation of knowledge from application are two key features of this culture which post-colonial societies continue to struggle with. The notion that knowledge is produced by Western societies, that the best we can do is to 'catch up' with them, is related to the first feature. Its impact on syllabi and textbooks — both densely packed with 'facts' — used at all levels of our school system is all too obvious. The second feature is reflected in the assumption which characterizes the teaching of all kinds of information, that it need not be applied in a real situation. This assumption applies to crucial information, too, such as oral rehydration therapy for diarrhoea or prevention of malaria by not letting water accumulate in open spaces. More often than not, both the teacher and the children tend to regard such information as crucial for success in examinations, not for actually preventing illness.

*Krishna Kumar.*



The second problem (poor administrative support of individual schools) has many repercussions, ranging from poor maintenance of school buildings to lack of teacher morale and accountability. Some of these have been dealt with in earlier chapters, others are illustrated in the case studies below.

## 7.2. Operation Blackboard

Operation Blackboard (OB) was launched in 1987 with the laudable aim of ensuring that every primary school had a

minimum quota of facilities and aids, described as follows:

- (1) At least two reasonably large all-weather rooms along with separate toilet facilities for boys and girls,
- (2) at least two teachers, as far as possible one of them a woman, and
- (3) essential teaching and learning material including blackboards, maps, charts, a small library, toys, games and some equipment for work experience.

*(Department of Education, Annual Report, 1997-8, p.32)*

### EDUCATION (MIS)MANAGEMENT IN NORTHERN MADHYA PRADESH

Words are inadequate to describe the state of primary education in northern Madhya Pradesh. One has to experience the total darkness of the mind to which entire generations have been condemned in order to appreciate the damage that has been done.

In Madhya Pradesh, Board examinations are conducted in classes 5, 8, 10 and 12. Before class 5, the rule is that no child can be failed. The harsh reality is that a large proportion of pupils appearing for the class-5 examination are not even able to write their name. To keep up appearances, and pretend that the system is functional, teachers resort to mass copying during the class-5 Board exam. Even then the results are not high. In some centres, when there is a hue and cry and cheating is prevented, the pass rate drops to 10 per cent or even less! Instead of being helped to grow, children learn to cheat, and to scorn rationality and knowledge.

The basic problem is a total lack of motivation amongst the teachers. In the rural primary schools, it is rare to find a teacher conscientiously teaching a class. Teachers complain about the lack of infrastructural resources, low salaries and the burden of non-teaching duties. But these are largely excuses, as teachers in private schools (who work more seriously, despite their lower salaries) have shown. The real problem is that teachers have little concern for the pupils they are entrusted with.

This lack of motivation percolates down from the politicians and bosses who control the education system. They have corrupted the entire framework. The appointment of teachers, their transfers and other administrative affairs are driven by political favours and financial remunerations. In Satna and Rewa district, there are many schools run in interior villages under the patronage of powerful politicians. These schools have virtually no infrastructure, yet every year thousands of pupils from these schools appear for the class-10 or even class-12 examinations. There is a fixed rate for passing the exam, ranging from Rs 2,000 to Rs 5,000 depending on the kind of result required.

The private schools have better standards, but they are run as business enterprises, mainly catering to privileged families. In most cases they are beyond the means of the poorer sections of society. A few private schools see education as a social need and structure themselves to provide quality education to the poor. But these are rare initiatives, looked upon with suspicion and even hostility by privileged social groups.

*Chandra Kant Shourie.*

All new primary schools were to be equipped with all three components from the very beginning. Further, Operation Blackboard treated these as 'three *inter-dependent* components which together provide a composite approach to the problems faced by schools'.

The PROBE survey suggests that Operation Blackboard has achieved some positive results. For instance, the proportion of single-teacher primary schools in the PROBE states has significantly declined (see chapter 4). Also, the famine of teaching aids and classroom material has been partially relieved. Aside from teaching aids, some schools are now the proud owners of items such as a bucket, a rope, a school bell, mats, and so on.

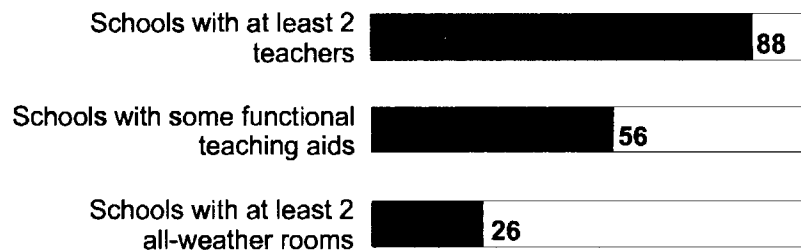
However, as we saw in chapter 4, the overall achievements of Operation Blackboard are well below target. One way of assessing the shortfall is to ask how many PROBE schools had achieved the Operation Blackboard benchmark, as described above. The short answer is 'none', if only because no PROBE school had functioning, separate toilets for girls and boys. Let us then consider a more liberal benchmark, with the following components: (1) at least two all-weather rooms, (2) at least two teachers, and (3) at least *some* teaching aids. Only one-fourth of all government primary schools in the PROBE villages attain this minimal benchmark.

Further, it should be noted that the appointment of extra teachers under Operation Blackboard (mainly to dispense with single-teacher schools) has, to some

extent, *substituted* for normal teacher appointments rather than supplemented them. Although Operation Blackboard appointments are meant to be additional appointments, several states slowed down on regular teacher appointments after Operation Blackboard began, to keep the overall salary bill under control. Indeed, the overall rate of growth of teacher-appointments has been *lower* in the last 10 years than in 1978-86 (Government of India, 1998, p.42) Operation Blackboard's success in reducing the number of single-teacher schools has to be read in this light.

CHART 7.1

## Unfinished Agenda of Operation Blackboard (per cent)



Functional teaching aids include teaching kits, toys, maps and charts, library and musical instruments. All-weather rooms are defined as *pacca* rooms with non-leaking roofs.

Source: PROBE survey.

### TOO LITTLE AND VERY LATE

Built in 1987, the village school at Hardua Pancham (Damoh, M.P.) got a roof only last year, and that too, claim the frustrated teachers, because they had persuaded *Navbharat Times* to publish a story about it. Two rooms of the school are still without a roof, and the flooring is still *kachcha*.

Note that Hardua Pancham is not a very poor village. In fact, the mid-day meal had to be upgraded to *sabzi* and two *rotis* as children did not like the earlier *dalia*.

Hardua Pancham's story is an extreme case, which almost turned the school (walls without a roof) into a local attraction. Yet this story brings to the fore a number of worrisome issues that are also common elsewhere:

1. While nothing was done about the school building, many children's studies were seriously impaired. Some even dropped out or quietly took refuge in a private school. In many PROBE schools, teaching is suspended for weeks or even months at a time as the school building is flooded during the monsoon. Leaky or absent roofs also lead to further decay of other parts of the school building.
2. Teachers and parents have little power to make or demand relatively simple improvements in the school building.
3. The administration remained oblivious to the problem until it surfaced in the media. Even after that, the work remained incomplete.



Another major lapse is the failure to realize that if the different components of Operation Blackboard are 'interdependent', then supplying one of them only may reduce the impact of the programme or even prove self-defeating. Here are some examples:

- The school has the toys and teaching kits, but these are kept locked up because there is only one teacher, one broken-down classroom and classes are held in the open (Khurd, Dholpur district, Rajasthan).
- Musical instruments and the science kit are in the teacher's house because the school building cannot be locked (Kanari, Varanasi district, U.P.).
- The teachers have received OB training but the school has not received the OB teaching aids (Vangaon, Saharsa district, Bihar).

Sometimes there is a hint of corruption. At several schools, headteachers complained that they were forced to sign for the complete OB kit whether each item was there or not, and whether it was functional or not. Musical instruments in particular were usually received in a broken state. Other schools complain that the original items were non-functional, and could not be replaced or repaired as Operation Blackboard is a one-time grant.

The management structure, however, shows no responsiveness to these implementation problems. Instead we have a bureaucratic approach, which concentrates on meeting certain quantitative

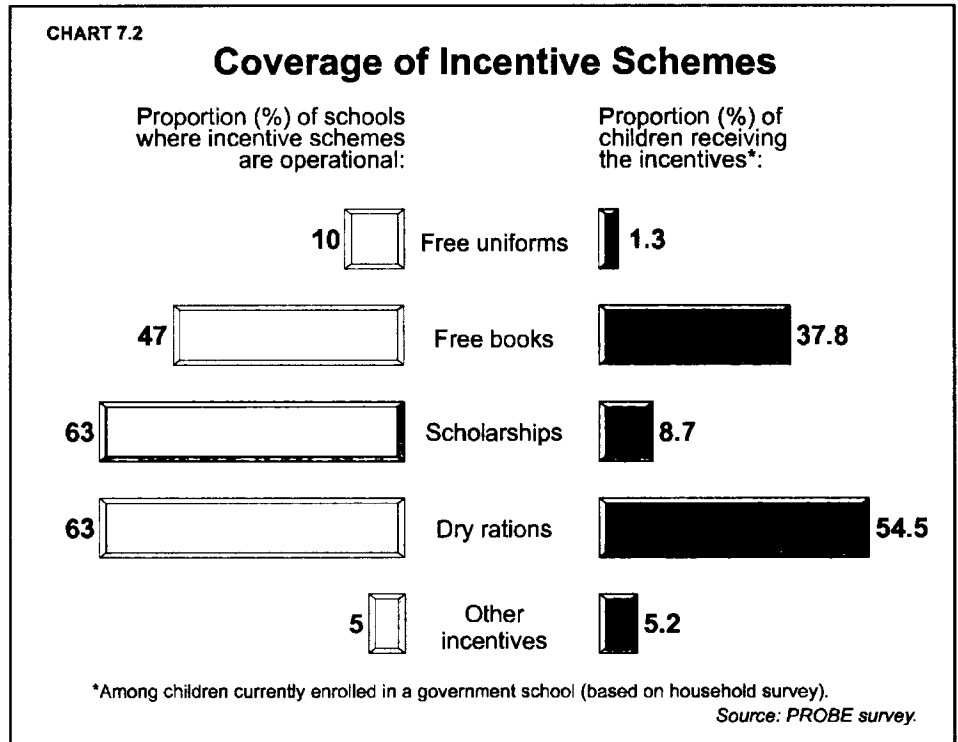
targets in terms of schools covered, teaching aids distributed, and so on. If these targets are met, Operation Blackboard is assumed to be doing fine.

Indeed, the real irony is not that the problems exist but rather that the management structure takes no cognizance of them, and has even decided that this phase of Operation Blackboard is a closed chapter. In its 1996-7 Annual Report, the Department of Education claims (p.33) that items (2) and (3) above have been 'fully provided to all the targeted primary schools'; the 1997-8 report reiterates (p.32) that 'the physical targets set under the Eighth Plan were achieved with remarkable success'. The next phase is to focus on providing a third room for primary schools with enrolment greater than 100, and on upper primary schools. It is as if the reality on the ground was supposed to match the figures in the document, rather than the other way round.

### 7.3. Incentive Schemes

Incentive schemes for school children are conceived by the planners as 'part of the approach of government' to motivate parents 'to send their wards to school' (Report of the working group on elementary education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1996). Earlier incentive schemes run by state governments include free textbooks and uniforms, often meant for children belonging to scheduled castes or poor families. In mid-1995, the central government initiated a national 'mid-day meal' scheme, which has actually been translated into a scheme of distribution of monthly 'dry rations' (usually wheat) to school children — see chapter 8.

Most teachers in the PROBE states felt that these incentive schemes were of great benefit to disadvantaged children, mainly in terms of enhancing enrolment and attendance. Parents tended to share this view. The most popular scheme was the 'dry rations' scheme, widely reported to have boosted school enrolment. The fact



that grain rations of 3 kgs per month are such a powerful magnet is a telling indication of the poverty of many parents.

Thus, the potential usefulness of incentive schemes is not in doubt. The main problem seems to be their tokenist implementation. The coverage of most incentive schemes is very limited (see Chart 7.2), and incentives are supplied in an erratic manner. Faithful to its inflexible and unresponsive style of operation, the education administration has ignored most of the implementation problems, preferring instead to create new and equally tokenist schemes from time to time.

Lack of timeliness in the provision of incentives is a common complaint. For instance, barely half of the 123 schools where scholarship schemes were operational had received the scholarship monies for the current year (several months after classes had begun). Delays of one or two years are not uncommon. Not only was the timing erratic, the amount received was often far less than the amount due. The consequences of erratic supplies are particularly serious in the case of textbooks. When those are received at the wrong time and in the wrong quantity, they may have little impact, or

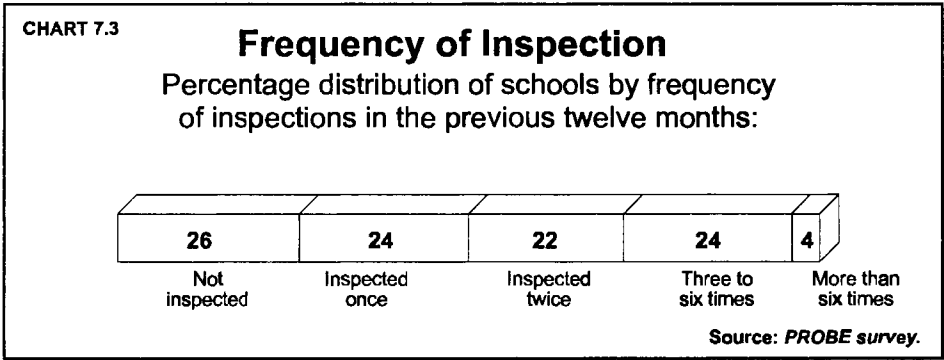
even disrupt the learning process. In the PROBE states, except for Rajasthan, textbooks were delivered at any time during the school year, and quantities were more or less arbitrary.

Erratic timings and whimsical distribution disrupt school functioning in other ways too. For instance, they breed hostility between teachers and parents, as the latter often suspect teachers of swindling scholarships and other incentives. Often teachers simply divide whatever they have received between all the pupils (one claimed that he ended up giving one rupee to each child!). If textbooks are in short supply, children may receive one book each instead of a complete set; we even found one household where two brothers studying in different grades were expected to share a single book. Further, ill-planned incentive schemes generate considerable extra work for teachers, aggravating the problems of teacher shortage and excessive paperwork. Much time and energy is spent in preparing lists of eligible students, dealing with complaints, distributing food rations, etc. Monthly distributions of food rations are a recurrent diversion. In Uttar Pradesh, teachers have to take the children to the nearest ration shop, often a long walk (2 kms in water-logged

terrain, in one case). Sometimes several trips are required, as children from several schools turn up together and the ration shop is unable to cope. In Bihar, teachers have to collect the food from the shop, and weigh and distribute it themselves — an interesting indication of the importance assigned to teaching duties by the education bureaucracy.

## 7.4. The Inspection System

The inspection system is a vital link between the education administration and individual schools. Its main function, in principle, is to ensure that adequate standards are maintained in government

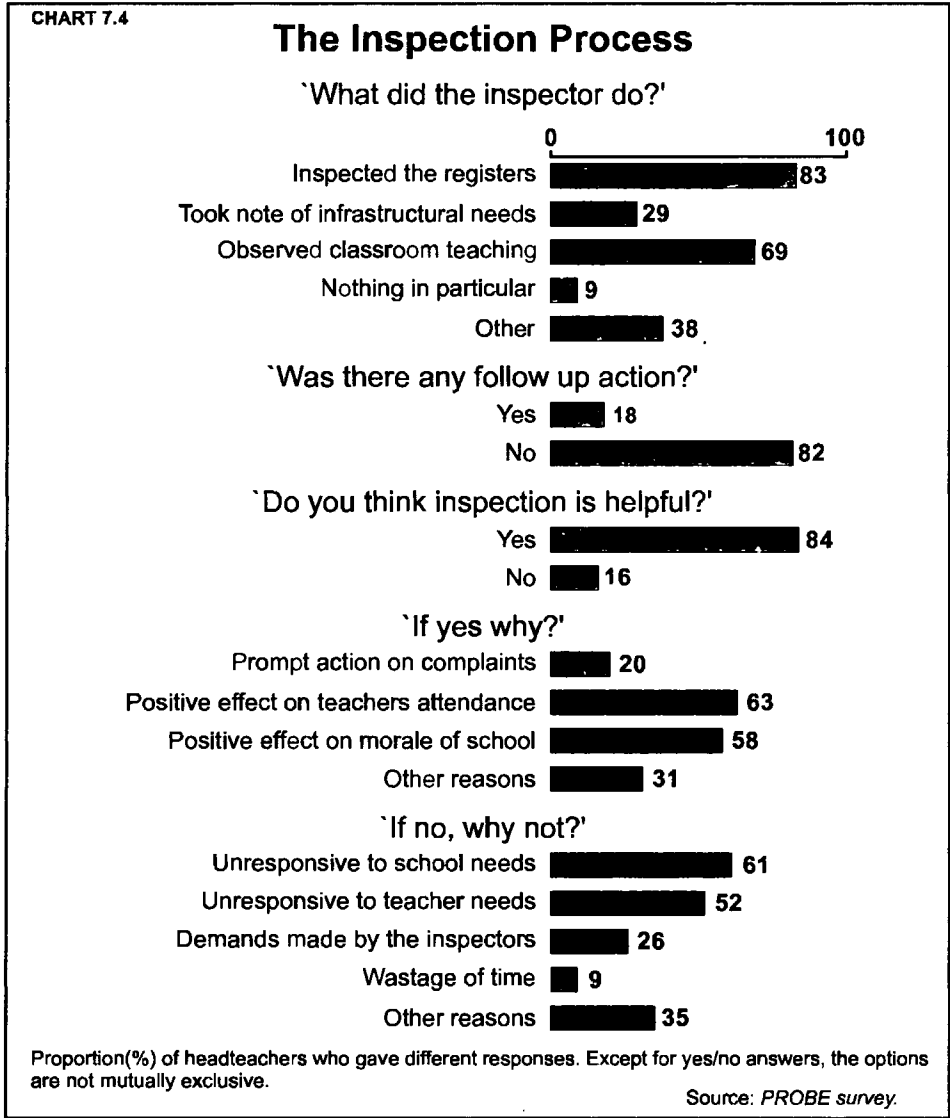


schools. One aspect of this is the role of the inspection system as an accountability mechanism. But inspectors can do much more than breathe down the neck of teachers, for instance by ensuring that teachers' complaints are heard and by advising them on teaching methods. As we saw in chapter 5, improved account-

ability and greater support play a complementary role in helping teachers to function more effectively.

That most of the PROBE schools lacked this vital input should be evident from the preceding chapters. We have noted, for instance, how the inadequacies of the school infrastructure tend to be left unattended (chapter 4). Thus, even the primary support mechanism — a functioning infrastructure — cannot be taken for granted. Such negligence cannot but affect the performance of teachers, both in hampering their teaching work and in sanctioning a lack of accountability to the pupils under their care. A careless management thus distorts the educational process by suggesting that education is not a serious matter or, alternatively, that the education of particular pupils is not important. Another distortion is that the management structures fail to ensure better facilities for disadvantaged children, whose parents are unable to provide the home support which teachers take for granted. This secondary level of support can hardly be expected of a management which often does not even provide the primary level of infrastructural support.

The inspection system remains oblivious to these matters. To start with, one quarter of the PROBE schools had not been inspected even once during the twelve months preceding the survey. Over the same period, 24 per cent of these schools had been visited three to six times, and 4 per cent had been visited more than six times. In some cases, repeated inspection was accompanied by some indication of corruption. The more important reason for uneven frequencies of inspection is that inspectors tend to concentrate on the



more accessible schools. Here again, the schools in greatest need of support from the administration (including single-teacher schools, often located in remote villages) receive least attention.

**A**mong the schools that did have at least one inspection in the preceding 12 months, a vast majority (82 per cent) reported that there had been no follow-up action. Thus, inspectors came and went

as if these schools were doing just fine. Their primary concern is to examine school registers, and while in 69 per cent of cases the inspector was reported to have 'observed classroom teaching', one wonders how often this went beyond a token ritual. Only 29 per cent of inspectors noted 'infrastructural needs', and 9 per cent were reported to have done nothing at all. As for talking with parents, inspectors do not seem to perceive this as being part of their job.

## AN INSPECTOR TURNS UP

*The primary school in Goala, a small village near Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh), is considered to be relatively good by local standards. On 19 February 1997, one of us happened to be there when the inspector arrived. Extracts from the witness' diary:*

When I arrived around 2 p.m., there was mayhem in the school. The children were running around without any supervision, mostly on or around the playground (the school has 145 pupils enrolled). Two of the three teachers were present. One of them was busy decorating the main classroom with the help of a few pupils, in anticipation of a function to be held two days later. He was freely hitting the children, in between sticking colourful paper triangles on the walls. The other teacher was idle, though he kept shouting at the children. The classrooms were filthy.

At around 2.45 p.m., a scooter arrives, driven by a young man. Riding pillion is a stern, imposing woman wearing an elegant sari — Mrs A. Singhal, the Block Education Officer. As she storms into the school, the teachers affect sheepish postures. Mrs Singhal has a well-rehearsed routine which lasts about 15 minutes: she asks where the missing teacher is ('on leave' is the answer), why the children are running around, why the teachers didn't send written reminders to the parents of absent children, why the names of chronic absentees are not struck off the rolls; asks whether there is a blackboard in each classroom; criticizes the lack of sitting mats, and the dirty state of the premises; inspects and stamps various registers (that, in fact, was her main activity); and finally writes a few lines in the Inspection Register, summarizing her observations.

Mrs Singhal was firm, and sometimes rude, but not entirely unhelpful, and she even managed one or two smiles. Her work does seem to serve some purpose, though it is quite superficial. For instance, she showed little concern for the fact that teaching had been suspended without good reason: in fact, a brief conversation suggests that she is resigned to this being the situation in most local schools. She is in charge of 130 schools and claims to visit each of them every month; this is probably an exaggeration, but she does seem to take her work seriously.

As soon as Mrs Singhal's scooter is out of sight, the teachers heave a sigh of relief and make a beeline for the local tea-shop. Before departing, they tell all the children to sit quietly in rows, instruct a 'monitor' to take the names of those who cause trouble in their absence, and hit a few children at random to show that they mean business. Later in the afternoon I see the teachers cycling back home, one hour ahead of the official closing time — the inspector's visit hasn't had much impact.

**A**s with incentive schemes, tokenism seems to be the main flaw of the inspection system. Interestingly, however, a majority of teachers described them as 'useful', mainly from the point of view of enhancing teacher attendance and the morale of the school. Despite its limitations, the inspection system seems to be contributing something as an accountability mechanism. In this connection, it is worth noting that 80 per cent of the teachers were present at the time of our visits. These unannounced visits took place late in the morning, and fail to capture the problem of late arrival and early departure, but nevertheless, they indicate lower levels of outright absenteeism than might have been expected in the light of parental complaints and the relaxed work culture of the teaching profession. It is possible that the inspection system has something to do with this, though other factors (such as parental vigilance and peer pressure) may also be at work.

**I**t seems that the contribution of the inspection system, if any, is limited to a crude 'watchdog' role. One reason for this is that inspectors, much like other cogs in the administrative wheel, feel a certain helplessness. Taking action on complaints may lead to protracted bureaucratic or even legal wranglings, so the temptation is to do the minimum. Even the watchdog role of inspectors is affected by this syndrome. The PROBE survey encountered only one case of action being taken against an errant teacher.

**A**nother cause of routinization is that the inspection system, like other parts of the administrative structure, is overstretched. As one senior bureaucrat of the Education Department in Rajasthan put it:

The main problem is the large size of organizations which is aggravated by the opening of new schools without keeping adequate provisions for administrative strengthening, so much so that the schools per inspector is now more than 50. With such a weak supervisory system, and an ever-increasing work load, there is a tendency for indiscipline, absenteeism on the part of the teacher, and lack of sensitivity on the part of the administration.

Faced with this work overload, inspectors and their superiors concentrate on what they see as the priority, such as the maintenance of school registers. Once again, the quality of teaching is out of focus. We might add that the figure of 50 schools per inspector *on average* (for Rajasthan) conceals wide regional variations, leading to a much higher ratio in the less well staffed areas. We have met Block Education Officers who, flanked with a single assistant, had to look after the inspection and administrative support of close to 200 schools. Asked how he managed to supervise so many schools, one of them aptly remarked, '*asambhav hai* (it's impossible)'.

## 7.5. The School Register

### Why it matters

The school register, which records whether little Kavita came to school on Wednesday or how long her brother Hira Lal has been absent, is a document of vital importance. It enables the teacher to spot at a glance the regular absentees, and contemplate necessary action. When numbers are large, attendance may be taken twice a day to check how many children have returned to school after the lunch break, or simply to convey the importance of attending the afternoon session. The register also gives a head-teacher valuable information on the functioning of the school, the social background of the pupils, and so on. The same information is of much use to the Education Department. For instance, the allocation of teaching posts and of pupil incentives (e.g. scholarships and food rations) between different schools is meant to be based on enrolment data from the school register. Similarly, drop-out rates calculated from these data can help to assess the quality of schooling in different villages or areas. At the national level, education statistics compiled from school returns are often used for research and planning.

Unfortunately, school registers in the PROBE states are not just badly kept but singularly unauthentic. Specifically, enrolment figures are routinely inflated, and many children marked 'present' in the attendance register are nowhere to be seen in the classroom. Following on that, the school register is seldom used to monitor the attendance of the individual child. Nor does it provide a credible basis to assess the functioning of a school, or to compile official data.

The precise extent of exaggeration in enrolment and attendance figures is not easy to assess, but the PROBE survey points to the following:

(1) On the day of the survey, the number of pupils actually present (based on a direct count by the investigators) was, on average, 20 per cent below the figure indicated by the attendance register. The true discrepancy between actual and official attendance is likely to be larger, because numerous schools had not filled the attendance register at all; these schools tend to fill the register one day after the event, and are likely to exaggerate attendance even more than other schools.

(2) Comparisons of school records with household data suggest that official enrolment figures are (on average) about 20 - 5 per cent above the true figures. Inflated class-1 enrolment figures account for the bulk of the discrepancy.

### Enrolment data

The principal means through which teachers inflate enrolment figures are as follows:

*Under-age enrolment* : This consists of writing the names of children below the normal age of school entry (e.g. 6 years) in the school register, even though they are not actually attending school.

*Nominal enrolment* : This often happens when teachers are required to carry out house-to-house enrolment drives at the beginning of the year. Children are nominally enrolled, with the consent of their parents, even if they don't attend school or attend for just a short period. In

some cases, teachers automatically put the names of *all* the local children in the relevant age group on the school register.

*Double enrolment* : In this variant of nominal enrolment, children attending an unrecognized private school (or tuition centre) are also enrolled in the local government school. This is because an unrecognized private school cannot issue certificates at the end of the primary stage. These children actually attend the private school, but get their certificate from the government school.

*Fake enrolment* : In this case, teachers include fake names in the school register, or write the names of out-of-school children without consulting their parents. If necessary, teachers dip into their own pockets to pay the fees of the ghost pupils (as may also happen with other over-enrolment techniques).

Of these methods, under-age enrolment seems to be the most common. One noteworthy consequence of this practice is that the margin of exaggeration in official enrolment data is *particularly high in class 1*. This, in turn, has led to various misperceptions. For instance, official estimates of 'drop-out rates' obtained by looking at the ratio of class-5 to class-1 enrolment are much higher than the drop-out rates found in household surveys, including the PROBE survey (see Box overleaf).

Why do teachers inflate enrolment figures? They have several incentives to do so: (1) If enrolment falls below a certain level, they may be transferred (because the school's pupil-teacher ratio falls below the official norm); (2) They may be under direct pressure from the Department of Education to show progress in enrolment over time, or 'universal enrolment' in the relevant age group; (3) Incentives such as food for mid-day meals (in which teachers often have a 'stake' of some kind) may be allocated on the basis of enrolment figures; (4) Parents may seek nominal enrolment for their children, to get incentives that do not depend on regular attendance, such as monthly food rations; (5) Private schools may approach them for 'double enrolment', a mutually advantageous arrangement. The bottom line is

## ENROLMENT PATTERNS: MYTHS AND REALITY

The Department of Education's latest *Annual Report* contains some interesting surprises. For instance, the 'gross enrolment ratio' at the primary level (that is, the number of children enrolled in primary schools as a proportion of all children aged 6-10) turns out to be a heart-warming 94 per cent in Rajasthan, rising to 115 per cent in Gujarat and 143 per cent in Nagaland — all well above Kerala's puny 91 per cent. Also heartening is the fact that the gross enrolment ratio (GER) is higher for girls than for boys in several states. On the negative side, the all-India GER seems to have registered its first-ever decline, plunging from 104 per cent in 1995-6 to 91 per cent in 1996-7.

These figures, however, are not worth the paper they are printed on, based as they are on official enrolment data compiled from school records. The GER might as well stand for 'gross *exaggeration* rate': in 1992-3, when more reliable data from the National Family Health Survey indicated that about one-third of all children in the 6-10 age group were out of school, the national GER was 106 per cent, *rising* to 108 among scheduled tribes and 111 among scheduled castes! Similarly, for the PROBE villages, GER figures based on school records would be much higher than enrolment rates obtained from household survey data.

This is one example of the confusion caused by inflated school records. Another example concerns official data on 'drop-out rates'. According to the same report (p.160), the proportion of children who quit school between class 1 and class 5 in the PROBE states is 36 per cent for boys and 40 per cent for girls. Note in passing that these numbers are hard to reconcile with the GER data printed in the same report. Be that as it may, PROBE survey data suggest much lower drop-out rates: among ever-enrolled boys in the 13-18 age group, only 7 per cent failed to complete class 5 (the corresponding figure for girls is 22 per cent, but this may be an underestimate due to undercounting of adolescent girls). These estimates are based on a relatively small sample, but they are broadly consistent with similar calculations based on National Family Health Survey data. There is, in short, strong evidence that official estimates of drop-out rates are seriously inflated.

The main reason for this is the practice of 'under-age enrolment', described in the text. Due to this practice, the margin of exaggeration in official enrolment data is *particularly high for class 1*. Hence, indirect estimates of 'drop-out rates' calculated by taking the ratio of class-5 and class-1 enrolment (the standard method) are themselves on the high side.

The fact that the true drop-out rates are, in all likelihood, much lower than the official estimates is good news. However, this finding has to be read in the light of the fact that many schools practise 'automatic promotion' of children from one class to the next. As discussed in chapter 3, some of them learn very little in the process.

*Data sources: Department of Education, Selected Educational Statistics 1993-94 (pp. 4-7) and Annual Report 1997-98 (pp. 155-60).*

that enrolment data are in shambles across the country, undermining a vital tool of school management and planning.

## ■ Attendance data

Attendance records are marred by similar irregularities. To start with, in many schools the teachers were simply unable to produce the attendance registers. In a few cases, this could be blamed on poor infrastructure, which made it difficult to store registers in the school. More commonly, the attendance registers were kept elsewhere for no apparent reason. If the headteacher is absent, the registers may be locked up, though otherwise available. One teacher simply refused to show the document and gave figures off-hand, with no relation to the number of children present. Others were happy to allow the investigators to examine the registers, but only after 'massaging' the attendance figures in their presence.

A majority of headteachers, however, cheerfully shared the attendance data, and nor did they make any effort to hide the problem of inflated attendance. A common practice is to fill the attendance register one day *after* the event, and to mark all or most children as present. If an inspector turns up, he or she can simply be told that 'we were just about to take down the attendance', and shown a neatly-filled attendance register for all the preceding days. About one-fifth of the schools surveyed had not taken attendance by the time of the investigators' visit in the middle of the day. Even in cases where attendance had ostensibly been taken, there were glaring discrepancies between the figures entered in the register and the actual number of children present. Only a small minority of schools showed conscientious maintenance of attendance records.

As with enrolment data, teachers have pragmatic reasons to exaggerate attendance figures. For instance, when the criterion of eligibility for monthly food rations is 80 per cent attendance during the previous month (see chapter 8), it is obviously convenient to massage the attendance figures so that all children pass the test. The supervisor of a cluster of ten

schools in Madhya Pradesh aptly sums up the situation in the area under his charge:

First, there is a survey of the 6-14 year olds and their enrolment status. There is a lot of exaggeration at this stage to avoid trouble. For the same reason no names are cut off once placed on the list... At the attendance stage, there is exaggeration again — if the attendance falls below 50 per cent, the teacher's increments are affected.

## 7.6. Regional Contrasts

Contrasts between the four PROBE states have received little attention so far in this report. The main reason is that the size of our sample is too small to make reliable regional comparisons. However, some tentative patterns did emerge from the quantitative and qualitative data, including the following.

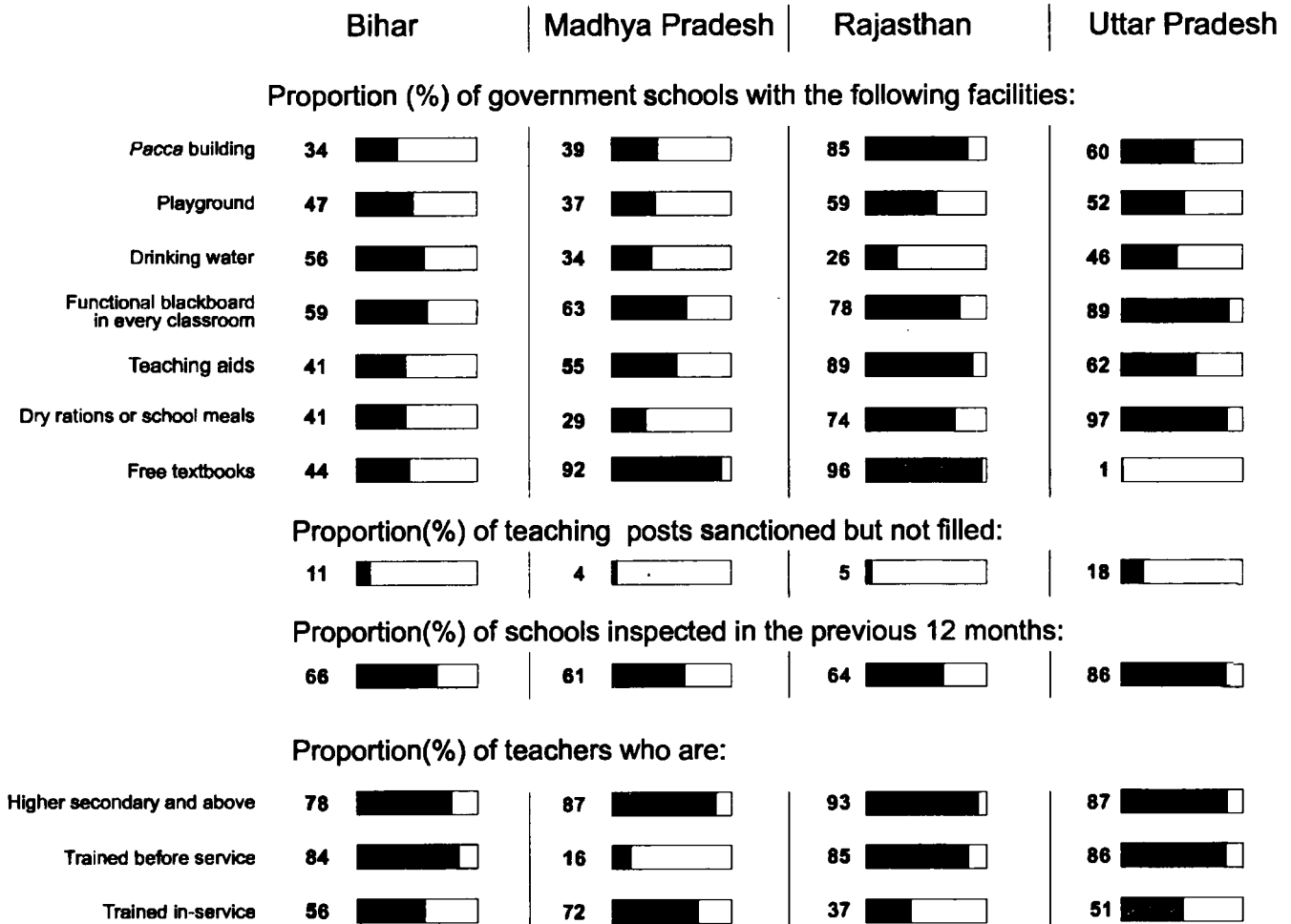
First, there is little to choose between the PROBE states, in terms of the condition of the schooling system. All the major

problems identified in earlier chapters (dilapidated infrastructure, inadequate teacher resources, low classroom activity, stifling curriculum, etc.) apply to some degree throughout these four states. Regional contrasts are of secondary importance.

Second, Bihar is the state where the situation is most critical in many respects. For instance, Bihar has the worst infrastructural facilities, abysmal teacher-pupil ratios, and the most haphazard implementation of pupil incentive schemes. In addition, Bihar has various problems of its own, such as erratic payment of teachers' salaries and disruption of

CHART 7.5

### Regional Contrasts



Source: PROBE survey



schooling due to law and order problems. Last but not least, Bihar shows little sign of making any attempt to resolve the situation. If anything, the schooling system seems to be deteriorating year after year.

**T**hird, if one were to ask which of the four PROBE states is 'doing best', we would tentatively answer Rajasthan. It is not that Rajasthan is doing better in every respect, or that it is far ahead of other states. In fact, literacy rates in Rajasthan are still quite low, and abysmal in the case of girls, reflecting both a legacy of endemic illiteracy and a highly patriarchal culture. However, the schooling system in Rajasthan does have some positive features in comparison with the other PROBE states, and there are signs of hope for the future. For instance, compared with other PROBE schools, primary schools in Rajasthan tend to have a better infrastructure and to be better maintained. Pupil incentive schemes are also more extensive in Rajasthan, and apparently better managed (e.g. free textbooks are received in most schools). Even the interaction between parents and teachers was found to be more positive in this state. All this may be a statistical accident, but these observations may be of interest given that Rajasthan — unlike Bihar — *has* made significant efforts to improve the schooling system in recent years. The PROBE

survey suggests that these efforts are not in vain.

**F**ourth, within Uttar Pradesh, the hill region is doing distinctly better than other parts of the state. Secondary data confirm that literacy and school attendance rates are considerably higher in the U.P. hills than in other parts of the state, and various field studies have also noted the rapid progress of elementary education in this region. The better districts within that region are doing remarkably well; Garhwal, for instance, has literacy rates above 90 per cent in the 15-19 age group — for boys *and* girls. There are interesting parallels here with the schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh, discussed in chapter 9.

**O**ne message running through these tentative comparisons is that state governments reap as they sow. There is a general problem of state apathy towards elementary education in the region, which is responsible for the dismal state of the schooling system. Within the region, there are some signs of positive change in the more 'interventionist' states, notably Rajasthan and also to some extent Madhya Pradesh. By contrast, in Uttar Pradesh and (especially) Bihar, where elementary education continues to receive a low priority, the situation is not only dismal but also stagnant if not deteriorating.

## Grave Irregularities in Bihar

A sample check of four documents of the 40 'education districts', according to the CAG report revealed large-scale 'illegal' appointments, opening of schools *sans* government approval and granting of 'irregular' promotions by the department...

In the test check of documents in Muzaffarpur, Sitamarhi, Vaishali and Samastipur districts the CAG reportedly 'detected 226 illegal appointments' of teachers, opening of 1007 primary and secondary schools without prior approval of the government and payment of higher scales to 1190 'untrained' teachers 'not eligible' for such higher scales. A few teachers continued in service for several years even after the age of superannuation, the report stated noting

'grave irregularities' were committed in the appointment of teachers on compassionate grounds.

No training was imparted in eleven primary education colleges since 1991 in four districts, even though Rs 4.51 crores was spent on salary and allowances of the officers and staff of these colleges, the CAG report said.

Only one teacher taught all the subjects in each of the 713 primary schools in three districts while there was not a single teacher in 81 schools. In four districts, 541 schools had no building or land on their own.

*The Hindu* (17 March 1997).

# 8

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# some recent developments

*An increasingly common sight: private schools in rural areas.*



ANAL SHAH

On the whole, there has been little change in the state of India's schooling system during the last few years. Nevertheless, there are a few interesting developments; a sample of these is examined in this chapter. The discussion is not exhaustive (the District Primary Education Programme, for instance, is outside the scope of this chapter), but we hope that it will give you a fair idea of recent trends.

### 8.1. School Meals

On 15 August 1995, the Prime Minister solemnly announced from the ramparts of the Red Fort that the government was

launching a national school-meal programme. At the time of the PROBE survey, in late 1996, the programme was meant to be in full swing. How is it doing?

#### ■ The case for school meals

The main argument for school meals is that they help to improve school enrolment and attendance. How far this actually works in practice remains to be established, but the informal evidence is encouraging. In areas where school meals are operational, most teachers take the view that they have boosted school attendance, and parents share this view.

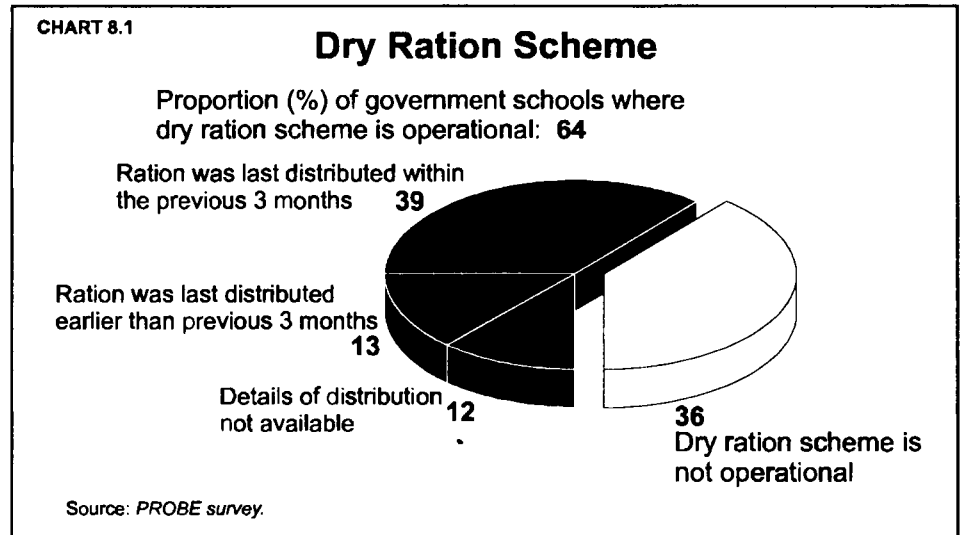
School meals have another feature that make them particularly effective in promoting school attendance: they provide an incentive not only to the *parents* (in the form of an implicit subsidy) but also to the *children* (who enjoy the free meal). This is important, since regular attendance depends on the motivation of children as much as on parental effort. Unmotivated children have to be patiently coaxed by their parents in order to go to school, and many parents lack the conviction or the time to do that. School meals help to solve this problem, by attracting children on their own.

Aside from this *incentive* argument, the case for school meals also involves a *nutrition* argument and a *socialization* argument. The strength of the nutrition argument depends on how nutritious the mid-day meal actually is. Providing a meal with high nutritional content can be expensive, in terms of both food costs and logistic arrangements. However, even a relatively simple meal may have some impact on the nutritional status of children, at least in deprived areas where calorie deficiency is endemic. Further, the nutrition argument is not just that school meals may boost child health, but also that hungry children are unlikely to be good learners. Even a plateful of *khichdi* can help to alleviate classroom hunger.

The socialization argument is simply that sitting together and sharing a meal helps to erode the barriers of class and (especially) caste. The fact that, in some villages, upper-caste parents criticize or even obstruct the provision of school meals is a telling sign that this socialization experience is far from trivial.

## ■ The ground reality

Unfortunately, none of the PROBE states have actually introduced school meals. As a convenient substitute, these states run a scheme of 'dry rations', whereby children receive monthly grain rations (3 kgs per child) instead of cooked food. The rations are intended for children with at least 80 per cent attendance the previous month, but in practice most teachers distribute the ration to *all* enrolled children. And it is easy to understand why they



should do so, if only because the official selection criterion is likely to be socially unacceptable in most places. In places where teachers did try to 'weed out' irregular children, bitter quarrels with parents often took place.

The 'dry rations' arrangement obviously defeats much of the purpose of the school-meal programme. As far as the incentive argument is concerned, the defect of this arrangement is to reward *enrolment* rather than *attendance*. While dry rations do seem to boost enrolment, their effect on attendance is likely to be much weaker. In terms of the nutrition and socialization arguments, dry rations are worthless.

A further problem is that even the promised monthly rations often fail to materialize. In large parts of Bihar, no food was released in 1996; supply failures and delays were also noted in a majority of schools in the other states. In many areas, monthly rations have been replaced with quarterly rations, which are likely to be even less effective in encouraging regular school attendance. And when food rations are actually distributed, it is usually at the end of a long chain of corruption and red tape. While the standard entitlement is three kilogrammes per child per month, many parents complain that they receive much less than that. We note in passing that the teacher who volunteered a bribe to the PROBE investigators (see p.61) offered a sack of grain from the dry-rations scheme.

*'The national school-meal programme is a good example of how a well-intentioned intervention degenerates into a farce due to bureaucratic apathy and corruption'.*

*(A district collector, posted in Bihar.)*

To be fair to the government, the 'dry rations' arrangement was explicitly mentioned in the programme guidelines as a permissible *interim* measure. However, mid-day meals were to be organized within two years of the introduction of the programme in mid-1995. To this day (mid-1998), none of the PROBE states have moved beyond dry rations (except in specific areas, under other schemes). Bihar has even moved in the opposite direction, *discontinuing* the programme rather than trying to improve it. There and elsewhere, one senses a lack of conviction in this initiative, which suggests political gimmickry more than considered planning.

## ■ Beyond dry rations

Implementing a genuine school-meal programme is an organizational challenge. For instance, it is essential to make sure that a separate helper is available to prepare and serve the meals, rather than let this burden fall on the slender shoulders of school teachers. As it is, the

## Scramble For the Incentive — Enrol All

The Bihar government's meal scheme in village schools involves no mid-day meal. It is beyond the capacity of the system to feed every child, every day. What takes place instead is the distribution of wheat every few months. And it has rapidly become the main, if not the only reason why children are registered in the school.

In our local primary school there are at least 150 children registered, from two-year-olds to 12-year-olds, but on most days there's only 20-25 hanging aimlessly around. They play in the verandah, in and out of the bare school rooms while the teachers chat among themselves...

When I first took my son for admission about a year ago, I sat with him for the first few days. Few children could write their own names, let alone construct whole sentences or words, after attending the school for two years. The industrious children copied the alphabet onto broken bits of slate and wrote out numbers 1-100 in their books. Ten-year-olds couldn't say whether 23 was less than 33, or how to write 'ba' or 'ka'. 'We've not been taught that,' they said. My son still comes back with his 'copy' unopened, or occasionally with the first few letters of the alphabet written in. The children are not divided into classes, no syllabus is followed, and no effective teaching takes place. Most children find better things to do than attending school.

But when the word spreads around that the wheat has come, guardians — men that is — spring into action. The

enterprising ones get their one- and two-year-olds admitted, or get their children admitted into two or three schools. And good-for-nothings who have not got their two- and three-year-olds admitted get rebuked by their wives...The days leading up to the big day see schools bursting at the seams, and a sense of purpose infects everyone.

On distribution day — D day — all pretence of teaching is abandoned. Village elders turn out in full force and all three teachers arrive, almost on time. Men bring their *lathis* since fighting broke out last time over dispensing the booty and grandmothers bring sacks to carry the wheat their malnourished grandchildren cannot possibly carry. Passers-by stop and watch the scene and the peanut-seller comes along to sell his wares. The whole process takes the entire day, children whimper and moan with hunger, adults argue and tempers get frayed in the mid-day heat, but no one goes away until their bag is filled.

For a few days after D-day many families happily eat 'sarkari' rotis and most children stop going to school completely, preferring to play in the mud, fish in the pond or are given work to do.

The scheme has as much to do with education as it has to do with malnutrition but no family will be fighting about that.

monthly distribution of dry rations is a disruption (see p. 88); if school meals lead to further chaos in the classroom, they could do more harm than good. Similarly, reliable arrangements are needed for the timely release of food quotas, or for local food purchases — it is impossible to organize a regular school meal if the supply of food is erratic.

To say that the PROBE states can take this organizational challenge in their stride would be wishful thinking. However, the challenge has been successfully faced in various contexts, not only in 'forward' states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu (where mid-day meals are a standard feature of government schools), but also in less likely places such as Gujarat and some tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh. There is a strong case for trying to extend these positive experiences to other areas, especially the poorer ones where hunger is endemic. Indeed, the rewards of an effective school-meal programme are likely to be large. Judging from our earlier analysis of schooling decisions (chapter 3), and from available experiences, school meals could go a long way towards mopping up the residual parental reluctance to send children to school. This applies particularly to *girls*: as we saw, parents are not generally opposed to female education, but they are reluctant to pay for it. School meals could make a big difference here, by reducing the private costs of schooling.

## 8.2. Shiksha Karmis

### The concept

In recent years, *shiksha karmis* have become popular with various state governments. The term 'shiksha karmi' is used here in a broad sense, to refer to various kinds of para-teachers hired by state governments to supplement the regular teaching staff. In Himachal Pradesh, for instance, 'voluntary teachers' are hired at about half the salary of a regular teacher and posted in understaffed schools, with the prospect of getting a regular post after ten years of service. Shiksha karmis in Madhya

Pradesh have a similar status, with some notable differences: they act mainly as substitutes for regular teachers in remote areas, often run schools on their own, earn tiny salaries, have low qualifications, and are appointed by local bodies. Rajasthan, pioneer of the shiksha karmi idea, follows an intermediate model. Non-government organizations (NGOs) also employ shiksha karmis in various regions, but this is not the focus of this section — NGOs are discussed further on.

First-hand observations from the PROBE survey suggest that, despite their low formal qualifications and salaries, shiksha karmis sometimes (though not always) work distinctly harder than regular

teachers. This can be explained in different ways. If you ask parents, many of them will immediately tell you that regular teachers are comparatively easy-going because they have permanent jobs and assured salaries. Shiksha karmis, for their part, are more accountable: a good teaching performance means keeping the job, and perhaps even the prospect of being 'regularized' in the future. Some shiksha karmis stated quite frankly that their overriding hope was to become regular teachers, so that they could relax ever after. In cases where shiksha karmis are recruited within the village, accountability to the community may also play a role, though in general we found no evidence that teachers posted in their own village perform better than others.

## TWO SHIKSHA KARMIS

Sarwana is a predominantly Gujjar village of Ujjain district (M.P.). It is quite remote — 3 kms from a paved road and 6 kms from the nearest bus stop. A teacher appointed earlier never joined duty at all. Now the primary school does have a teacher, but he lives 19 kms away and is very irregular. So is the teacher appointed in Kari, a remote tribal village of Siddhi district (M.P.).

Shiksha karmis have been appointed in both Sarwana and Kari, to work with the regular teachers. When the PROBE investigators arrived, the regular teachers were absent in both cases but the shiksha karmis were present and teaching. For their efforts, they earn a meagre Rs 800 per month — a fraction of the salary of the regular teachers.

The Sarwana shiksha karmi is the sarpanch's brother-in-law. He lives, for the most part, in the nearest town of Kachrod (12 kms away), where he is studying for his BA. He is quite contemptuous of the Gujjars and their desire or ability to acquire education. Although he is '12th pass', he has had no training, either pre-service or in-service. Not surprisingly, the children had made little or no progress.

The shiksha karmi in Kari is struggling against great odds. Kari is predominantly inhabited by poor tribals (Gonds and Kols). When the PROBE investigators arrived, around 30 children were gathered under a *ber* tree. Some of them were writing, others were listening to the instructor. The children, all first-generation learners, seemed to be of widely differing ages. As they worked they casually picked up and ate the ripe *ber* fruit scattered under the tree.

All the children in this new school are in the same class. The instructor says that it is hard to teach older children the class-1 material, but it has to be done. He also finds commuting difficult (he lives 9 kms away and has to walk and cycle to the school over rough terrain). The school has no shelter; the community is keen to provide shelter and facilities to the school, but this has yet to be done. If no arrangement is made for shelter before the monsoon, the school will have to be closed.

In some circumstances, another reason for the better performance of shiksha karmis (if real) is that they are carefully selected, trained and supported. This often happens in the context of NGO-managed programmes, though it is much less common when shiksha karmis are government appointees. The other side of the same coin is that, when shiksha karmis are left to their own devices, without a minimal support and accountability structure, they can be extremely slack. This has happened on a large scale in the government's 'non-formal education centres', as will be seen below.

## ■ Pros and cons

Shiksha karmis are potentially useful as a temporary, low-cost supplement to the regular teaching staff. This practice, however, also has several dangers. First, there is an obvious issue of *equity* between regular teachers and shiksha karmis. The latter are often treated as convenient underlings, and deeply resent their inferior status and (especially) low pay *vis-à-vis* regular teachers. Dual hiring policies can also be challenged in court (on the grounds of 'equal pay for equal work'), and indeed legal entanglements have already raised their ugly head in several states.

Second, linked with the equity issue is that of *sustainability*. As shiksha karmis get politically organized, their demands for regular posts become harder to resist. If their integration in the regular teaching staff is done in a coherent and planned manner, as seems to be the case in Himachal Pradesh, regularization is not necessarily a bad thing: ten years of active service, together with adequate educational qualifications, may be as good a training as a teacher is likely to get otherwise. On the other hand, if poorly-selected and poorly-trained shiksha karmis are hastily regularized through sheer political pressure, they may end up *weakening* rather than strengthening the teaching cadre. This would also defeat the main purpose of the shiksha karmi approach (as perceived by state governments), namely to appoint additional teachers at low cost.

### Abdication ?

*'In remote and inaccessible villages, often no teacher would come to teach.*

*The primary school building, dilapidated and forlorn, would lie in wait... To tackle the chronic problem of teacher absenteeism, a novel idea was generated... The crucial innovation in this, the Shiksha Karmi Project, is the selection of two ordinary villagers, to replace the (formally qualified but chronically absent) primary school teacher. These two ordinary villagers would henceforth be responsible for teaching all the children of their village.'*

*Department of Education, 1993:  
Education for All: The Indian Scene,  
p.31; emphasis added.*

Third, the shiksha karmi approach involves a potential risk of institutionalized *dualism* in the schooling system. This issue may not arise when shiksha karmis are posted as auxiliary teachers in the mainstream schools, and are spread evenly throughout the schooling system. In practice, however, shiksha karmis tend to be posted in areas where regular teachers are reluctant to go, such as tribal areas or 'backward' villages. In these deprived areas, shiksha karmis are used as low-cost substitutes for non-performing teachers, often managing entire schools on their own. This policy tends to be supported by regular teachers, who are thereby more likely to be posted

in attractive areas. The outcome is a pattern where deprived children are taught by poorly-qualified, low-paid shiksha karmis while those from privileged families are more likely to be taught by a regular teacher.

How much this matters depends on whether shiksha karmis can be expected to impart education of the same quality as regular teachers. In principle, this is not impossible, if shiksha karmis make up for their lower qualifications through greater effort. Even then, it is not clear why low-cost teaching arrangements should be concentrated on the deprived sections of the population. One answer is that this policy is really an admission of the failure to motivate regular teachers to work in deprived areas. That may be a reality to live with in the short run, but long-run abdication on this front is a questionable strategy.

To conclude, the pros and cons of shiksha karmis depend a great deal on *how* they are integrated in the schooling system. They certainly have something to contribute as temporary auxiliaries in under-staffed schools, but the success of this approach calls for resisting various pitfalls, especially political pressures to use shiksha karmis as permanent substitutes for regular teachers in deprived areas.

## 8.3. Alternative Schooling

The shiksha karmi phenomenon can be seen as part of a broader trend of increasing reliance on 'alternative schooling' as a means of reaching under-privileged children and achieving universal elementary education. The appropriate role of alternative schooling (sometimes described as 'non-formal schooling') is one of the most difficult issues of education policy today.

At the outset, it is helpful to make a distinction between 'alternative schooling' and

'alternative education'. The former refers to the creation of parallel schooling facilities for deprived children. The latter is concerned with the need for innovative pedagogy, focusing for instance on comprehension and personal development rather than on the accumulation of knowledge. As we saw in chapter 6, the case for this type of pedagogical improvement is overwhelming. As things stand, teaching methods are mercilessly stultifying, and it is a miracle that children survive them without entirely losing their creative abilities and independence of mind. The need for radical pedagogical change, however, applies throughout the schooling system (even in privileged urban schools), and not to deprived children alone. In that sense, the need for promoting alternative *education* is only tangentially related to the case for creating alternative *schooling facilities* for deprived children. Our concern here is with the latter.

### ■ Non-formal education centres

The first generation of alternative schooling facilities under government auspices consisted of a network of 'non-formal education centres' (NFE centres for short) sponsored by the central government. Officially, there are 2.4 lakh NFE centres in India, i.e. one for every other village or so. Evaluation studies, however, indicate that a large proportion of these NFE centres are non-functional. This is confirmed by the PROBE survey: in the 188 sample villages located in the four PROBE states, we found fewer than 10 functional NFE centres (one village had as many as nine NFE centres, all non-functional). Even in the 'functional' centres, the level of teaching activity was minimal. So much so that, in many cases, local residents and even school teachers were unaware of their existence. In 1,221 sample households, the survey found only *two* children who were actually enrolled in an NFE centre. And the survey did not uncover a single case of a child who had 'graduated' from a non-formal education centre to a formal school, even though one of the main goals of NFE centres is precisely to make this possible.



Notwithstanding these and other clear indications of the failure of the programme, the creation of scores of additional NFE centres continues unabated — the current target is 3.5 lakhs. As a top-level bureaucrat from the Department of Education candidly put it at a recent seminar in Delhi, 'non-formal education survives because it is a profitable industry'.

Asking why these NFE centres have failed is, in a sense, asking the wrong question. It is more pertinent to ask how they were expected to function in the first place. The centrally-sponsored NFE centres replicate all the operational problems of the formal schooling system: lack of supervision, inadequate infrastructure, absence of community participation, debilitating curriculum, to name a few. How, then, are NFE centres supposed to succeed where the formal schooling system has failed?

## ■ Supplement or substitute?

The NFE fiasco is not a final verdict on the principle of alternative schooling. In fact, some non-government organizations have achieved great successes in this field, based on adequate support and accountability structures. Inspired by

## A FUNCTIONING NFE CENTRE

*Impressions of a member of the PROBE team :*

Kanta was still fresh in my mind when I reached the 'non-formal education centre' in Salemabad (Ajmer, Rajasthan). Ten-year old Kanta cannot go to regular school. While her mother and father are doing wage labour during the day, she looks after her three siblings. Non-formal education centres are meant for children like her.

'And what is this letter?' asked the young NFE instructor. He struggled to get an answer from the 8-10 girls seated outside his hut at dusk. The letters on the roll-top blackboard were barely visible in the half-light. A kerosene lamp flickered helpfully, sharing its rays between the kitchen space inside the hut and the class outside. As the darkness gathered, the warrior against illiteracy gave up and told his pupils to copy from the board. Straining to make out the shapes of the letters, the girls complied quietly.

The village had a second NFE centre, and I asked to see it. 'That one is usually closed,' someone volunteered. 'Anyway, the path isn't safe. Plenty of snakes.'

A bit difficult for Kanta, I mused. Either you need very powerful spectacles or you need stilts.

these experiences, state governments have initiated new programmes of alternative schooling, with varying success. In some states, alternative schooling is increasingly considered as the key to universal elementary education.

The case for alternative schooling, however, has to be carefully assessed in context. In particular, it is important to enquire whether alternative schooling facilities respond to a *genuine need* for

learning opportunities outside formal schools, as opposed to providing a convenient opportunity to dispense with formal schooling for other reasons. The latter can happen in at least two ways. First, the local school may have poor teaching standards, leading parents to send their children to an alternative schooling facility even though their first choice would be a good school. Second, the local school may function, yet parents may be tempted to send some of their children to alternative schooling centres to reduce the costs, or simply because it is convenient to keep them at home for most of the day. The danger is especially real for girls.

One possible example of genuine need arises in the case of working children for whom school timings are not suitable. In the light of our earlier findings, however, the proportion of such children may well be much smaller than is commonly assumed (see chapters 2 and 3). For a significant proportion of children, school timings do clash with work activities during the peak agricultural season, but this is probably better dealt with by adjusting the school calendar (say on a district-wise basis, as in Himachal Pradesh) than by creating parallel schooling facilities for these children. Also, child labour is not an immutable phenomenon, and one of the arguments for the universalization of

*Below : Universalizing elementary education could rescue this child (see Box, p. 101).*



SONDEEP SHANKAR

elementary education is precisely to liberate children from the burden of excessive work. This is not to deny that alternative schooling facilities may have a short-term role in specific situations where child labour is both widespread and difficult to eliminate.

**A** related issue is whether alternative schooling facilities are provided as a *temporary supplement* to the mainstream schools, or as a *permanent substitute*. Providing special learning facilities for drop-out children, for instance, is certainly a useful thing. So is posting a shiksha karmi in an under-staffed school, as a provisional arrangement. But it is quite another matter to argue that alternative schooling facilities provide an adequate long-term *substitute* for formal schools.

**I**n specific situations, there may be a case for setting up alternative schooling facilities of a permanent nature. In some areas, for instance, there is a real problem of population dispersion in tiny hamlets, where a formal school is not viable. This is one situation where alternative schooling facilities may have a lasting role. Note, however, that the proportion of the rural population living in hamlets of less than 300 persons (a reasonable cut-off for the viability of a formal school), and more than one kilometre away from the nearest school, is below 3 per cent. Hence, this argument for alternative schooling facilities applies only to a tiny fraction of the population, and should not be confused with a general case for alternative schooling.

**I**f we raise these questions, it is not due to any inherent objection to alternative schooling facilities. Their potential has been well demonstrated in various contexts, and there are many wonderful examples of how alternative schooling has opened up new opportunities for deprived children (for an example, see p. 110). The issue is that a real dilemma can arise between the short-term need for alternative schooling facilities and the long-term goal of integrating all children in a common schooling system. This is particularly so at a time when state governments are short of funds, and tempted to use alternative schooling as a low-cost short-cut to universal elementary education. The way ahead is not to abandon alternative schooling, but to promote it with circumspection.

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## CHILD LABOUR AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

In a broad sense, all out-of-school children must be considered child labourers: if they are not in the work-force today, they will join it tomorrow.

All evidence from the field indicates that children who are working from a young age burn themselves out by the time they are 30 or 35 years old. They have not had any education worth the name, and their health is severely impaired. Often they are heavily in debt. The circumstances of unemployment (if not unemployability), combined with their inferior position in the hierarchy of caste and class, predispose them to putting their own children to work. And so the downward spiral of poverty and exploitation wends its way.

Free and compulsory education is a necessary, if not sufficient condition, for the elimination of child labour. The word 'compulsory' worries many: Will it mean harassment of poor parents if they don't send their children to school? Will they have to suffer economic hardship if they do send them? It should be remembered though that all societies which have introduced compulsory education have combined schooling with work for some time, but the priority has been *education first and work later* — not the other way around.

The experience of NGOs, from MV Foundation in Rangareddy district, Andhra Pradesh (see section 8.5) to CREDA in

Mirzapur district (Uttar Pradesh), suggests that the poorest of the poor *are* interested in the education of their children and are even willing to contribute to it. In the carpet-weaving belt of Bhadohi, Mirzapur district, children themselves are making lists of all out-of-school children to enable CREDA to put pressure on the administration to provide schools. In both districts, the authorities have been inundated with demands for admission into schools.

The NGOs that have succeeded in eliminating child labour are those that believe in mainstreaming children into the formal school system and not marginalizing them further through 'non-formal education' for a couple of hours at night by candle-light. It is these NGOs which have mobilized parents, children, communities, employers and government officials to get children out of work and into school. These NGOs have searched for community solutions instead of standing aloof in the expectation of future state action. This changing of mindsets has to start with all of us who are forever finding reasons and explanations for why the poor need to send their children to work and not to school. The poor are ready to make all the necessary sacrifices to give their children a chance in the future — but are we ready to share the shrinking cake of opportunities with others who are more disadvantaged?

*Neera Burra.*



## 8.4. Private Schooling

Private schooling is often thought to be confined to urban areas, but this is not the case. In many of the PROBE villages, private schools are a flourishing business, which presents both opportunities and dangers.

### Parental views on private schools

Two conditions are favourable to the emergence of private schools in a specific area: (1) the breakdown of government schools, and (2) parental ability to pay. Often, the former is more decisive than the latter. In rural Himachal Pradesh, for instance, there is a good deal of purchasing power, but the government schools function well, so that there are few private schools. In central Bihar, by contrast, poverty is endemic, yet private schools can be found in many villages (see p. 140) due to the dysfunctional state of government schools. When asked why a private school had been opened in the village, private-school teachers usually mentioned either the absence of a government school or its malfunctioning.

*Below: A girl in a private school in a PROBE village. Private-school enrolment showed a sharp bias against girls.*

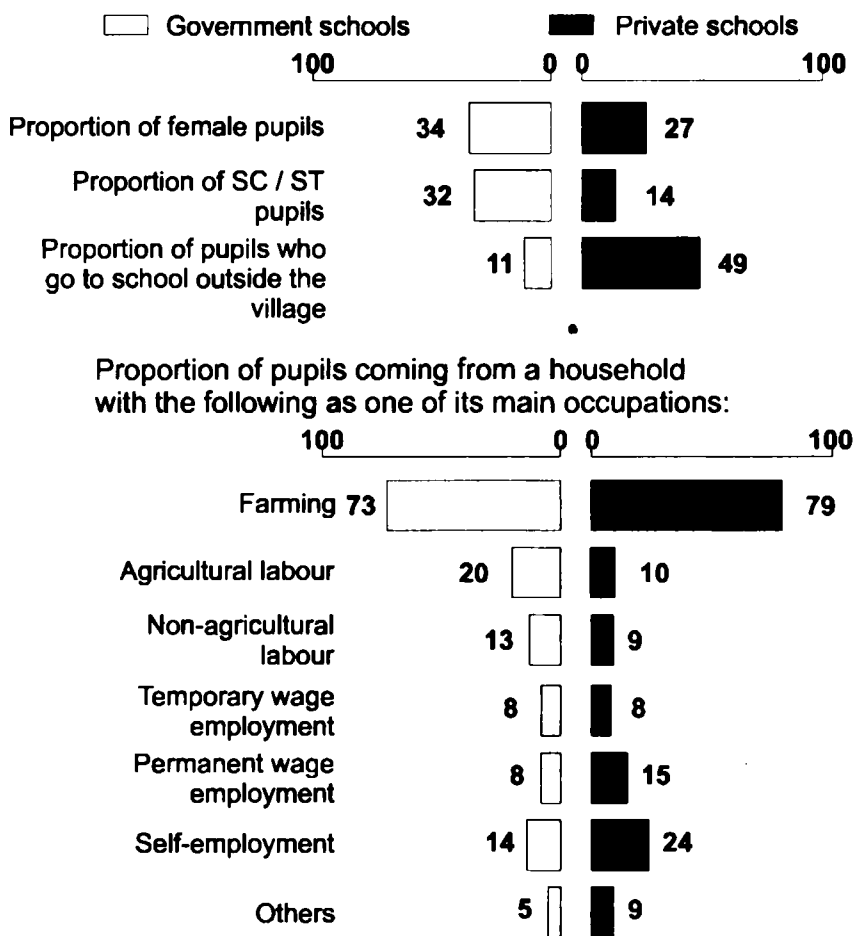


ANAL SHAH

CHART 8.2

## Government vs. Private Schools

### Part 1: Pupil Characteristics



Source: PROBE survey (household data).

Among the PROBE sample households, 18 per cent of school-going children are enrolled in private schools, rising to 36 per cent in Uttar Pradesh. In the other states, this proportion ranges from 5 to 11 per cent. The finding that private schooling is most widespread in Uttar Pradesh is consistent with an earlier survey by the National Council of Applied Economic Research. Half of the children enrolled in private schools go to school *outside* their own village (compared with 11 per cent among those enrolled in government schools). There is a sharp gender bias in private schools, where barely one-quarter of the pupils are girls.

As parents see it, the main advantage of private schools is that, being more accountable, they have higher levels of

teaching activity. This is confirmed by the PROBE survey: in most of the private schools we visited, there was feverish classroom activity. As a rule, they placed a visible emphasis on discipline and instruction.

Most parents stated that, if the costs of sending a child to a government and private school were the *same*, they would rather send their children to a private school. The reason, almost invariably, is that they are dissatisfied with the functioning of the local government school. In practice, of course, the costs are higher for private schools, keeping these schools out of reach of many parents even when a private school is physically available in or near the village.

**H**aving said this, it would be a mistake to think that private schooling is restricted to privileged families. Even among poor families and disadvantaged communities, one finds parents who make great sacrifices to send some or all of their children to private schools, so disillusioned are they with government schools. Among PROBE children enrolled in private schools, one-fifth came from families where casual labour was one of the main occupations, and over one-half belonged to a 'scheduled caste' (14 per cent) or 'other backward caste' (39 per cent). Some poor families concentrate their efforts on sending *one* child (usually a boy) to a private school, the others being sent to government schools or kept at home. The fact that parents in poor families often make enormous sacrifices to send their children to private schools confirms their high motivation for education. It also reinforces another point discussed in chapter 3, namely that even poor parents aspire to some kind of quality education for their children.

### ■ Characteristics of private schools

**P**ivate schools are of many different kinds, even within rural areas. Starting with official categories, private schools may be 'recognized' or 'unrecognized'. Unrecognized private schools receive no state support and are not allowed to issue certificates. Recognized private schools may be 'aided' or 'unaided'. In aided schools (there are very few in rural areas of the PROBE states), teachers' salaries are paid by the government. All recognized schools, aided or unaided, are supervised by the government and allowed to issue certificates. In the PROBE state's 188 sample villages, we identified 41 private schools, of which 26 were unrecognized, 13 were recognized but unaided, and only 2 were aided. Most likely, these figures involve some undercounting (especially of unrecognized schools), as private schools tend to be located in the larger villages where their presence is often inconspicuous.

**E**ven within these three official categories, there are wide variations between

CHART 8.3

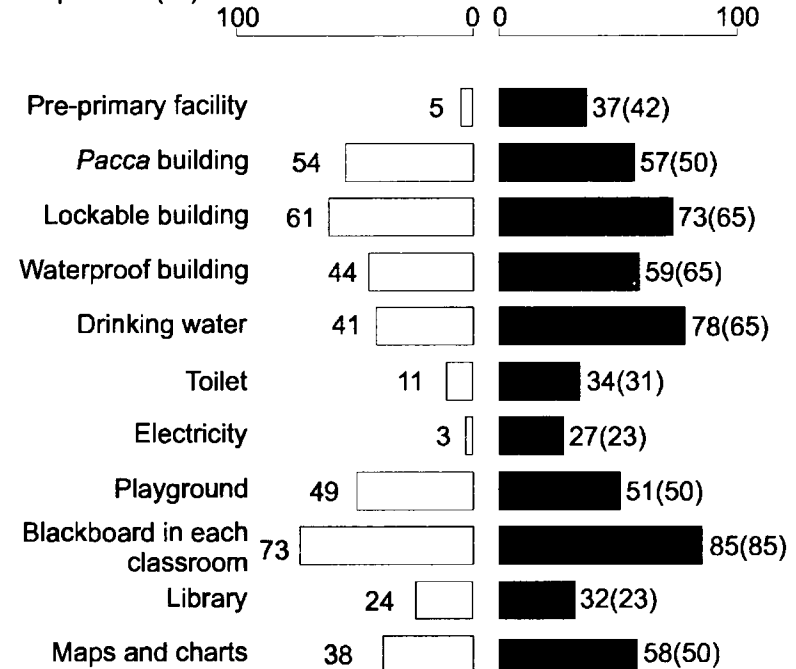
## Government Schools vs. Private Schools

### Part 2: The School Environment

□ Government schools      ■ Private schools\*

#### Infrastructure:

Proportion (%) of schools with:



#### Teachers:

Pupil /teacher ratio	50	25(23)
Proportion (%) of female teachers	21	13(11)

#### Proportion (%) of class-1 teachers who are:

SC / ST	20	13 (12)
Residing in the village	27	73 (65)
Also doing other jobs	47	76 (77)
Giving tuitions	3	27(19)
Graduates	45	57 (44)
Trained (pre-service)	69	20 (4)

#### Attendance:

Recorded attendance as % of recorded enrolment	69	84 (79)
Observed attendance as % of recorded attendance	81	96 (98)

\*In brackets, the figures for unrecognized private schools.

Source: PROBE survey.

schools in terms of the services provided, level of fees, facilities available, and so on. Some private schools are little more than 'quack' coaching centres, run in a shack or open space by some unemployed educated youth. Others have modern facilities, charge expensive fees, and try to project the image of a model school. In so far as a general picture emerges, it includes the following features:

**Premises:** The premises of private schools in the sample villages are, in most cases, simple but functional. Often they do no better than government schools in terms of *availability* of various facilities (e.g. classrooms and blackboards), but the *utilization* of these facilities tends to be more efficient. About half of the private-school buildings, for instance, did not need any repair. Many private schools even manage to create some kind of learning environment with the simple means available to them. But the simplest 'unrecognized' private schools have an environment even worse than most government schools, with poky rooms, plenty of filth, no teaching aids and — in five cases — not a single blackboard.

**Teachers:** Private-school teachers tend to belong to privileged castes, with an even a lower proportion of women than in government schools. Their formal educa-

**English is the big selling point of private schools. 'Why should they pay us Rs 25/- per month if we don't give them something special,' said one private-school teacher.**



ANAL SHAH

**After the class:  
infrastructure in  
PROBE-village  
private schools  
is often not  
much better  
than the  
infrastructure  
found in  
government  
schools.**



ANAL SHAH

tional qualifications are similar to those of government teachers, but most of them (80 per cent) are untrained. The informal unrecognized schools often hire 'teachers' with only the bare minimum of qualifications (in two cases, they had studied only upto class 8). Private-school teachers also receive very low salaries — often less than one-fifth of the salary of a government teacher with similar teaching responsibilities. On the positive side, private schools have a distinctly higher teacher-pupil ratio than government schools.

**Teaching methods:** On the whole, teaching methods are not very different in private and government schools. In both cases, the main emphasis is on crude methods such as reciting numbers, memorizing exercises, and copying from textbooks. The main difference is the closer monitoring of children in private schools. Class-1 children, much neglected in government schools (see chapter 4), receive close attention in private schools, perhaps because private-school teachers are keen to retain their 'clients', and know that a neglected class-1 child can easily drop out. Multi-grade teaching is common in both cases, but the range of grades and number of children simultaneously taught are usually smaller in private schools, thanks to their better teacher-pupil ratios. Another notable difference is the greater emphasis on order and discipline in private schools, which tends to be much appreciated by the parents, though children may differ.

**English medium:** English-medium instruction is a big selling point of private

schools. Among the 41 private schools surveyed, 17 were 'English-medium' schools, and most of the others had English as a subject. But here again, there is a great deal of variation in the credibility of English instruction, with teachers themselves knowing little more than a few sentences of English in some of the unrecognized schools. Most parents, alas, cannot tell the difference.

**Attendance:** Aside from high levels of classroom activity, private schools have high attendance rates — understandably so since parents want something in return for their fees. On average, 84 per cent of the children enrolled were present at the time of the PROBE survey; a few private schools even had *all* enrolled children present, a situation not found in government schools.

**Parental support:** Generally, the rapport between parents and teachers is more constructive in private schools than in government schools. In general, parents cooperate in sending children to school regularly, and at least a third of the private schools said the parents had actually contributed to school needs (e.g. by providing hay for the roof, labour to improve the school building, or simple classroom furniture). In Bakhunkhola (Almora, U.P.), the private school reported that it would never have been able to run in such a poor village without the cooperation of the parents. Only 3 out of 41 private schools had major complaints, mainly about parental indifference and delays in the payment of fees. There seems to be an element of mutuality in teacher-parent relations in private schools, whereby

parents are willing to help because the school is actually looking after their children.

In all these respects, recognized schools tend to achieve higher standards than unrecognized schools. The worst among the latter tend to be as problematic as government schools.

## ■ Opportunities and dangers

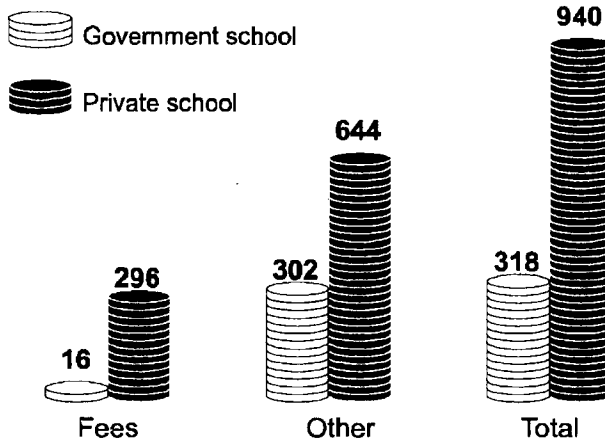
This picture of private schools may seem relatively rosy. Their main achievement is a high level of classroom activity, reflecting some accountability to the parents. For the same reason, they perform relatively well on several other counts: better utilization of facilities, greater attention to young children, responsiveness of teachers to parental complaints. Parents, for their part, actively support their children's studies, as they do not want the fees to be wasted.

Having said this, private schools (especially the more informal ones) have some serious limitations. First, private schooling remains out of reach of the vast majority of poor parents, who cannot afford the fees and other expenses. Informal private schools charge moderate fees, but nevertheless, the cost difference between

CHART 8.4

### Comparative Costs of Schooling

Average cost of sending a child to primary school (Rs/year)



Source: PROBE survey (parents' estimates).

government and private schooling is substantial in the eyes of poor parents. Given that many of them find even government schooling to be expensive, it is not surprising that children enrolled in private schools come mainly from better-off families.

Second, private schools often take advantage of the vulnerability of parents.

Most of the parents have little idea of what goes on in the classroom. They know that teachers turn up on time, keep the children busy, and maintain discipline, and in all these respects private schools strike them as far superior to government schools. Even an inept teacher, however, can maintain these appearances without imparting much education to the children. Benches and desks can also make an impression on parents, without necessarily meaning much in terms of quality of schooling. The hollow claim of English instruction made by many private schools is another illustration of this problem.

Third, private teachers have little reason to promote the personal development of the children, to treat them with sensitivity, or to impart a sense of values. Their overwhelming objective is to cram the heads of the pupils, so that they may pass the relevant tests and examinations. To some extent this problem applies in government schools too, but at least in the latter case there is a possibility of stimulating the interest of teachers in alternative teaching principles and practices. Sports and games, for instance, are observed in some government schools, but private schools have no time for this, at least not in the PROBE villages. It is only when a

### DIWAN SINGH'S JOY AND RUPPO'S PAIN

The 55-year-old scheduled-caste labourer whom we interviewed at Singapatti village (Mathura, U.P.) apparently has great value for education. The family is spending Rs 1000/- annually on the education of little Diwan Singh, his grandson, in a private school. It is a luxury that the family can ill afford but given the sorry state of the government school it is a necessary expense if Diwan Singh is to get any education at all. 'Masterji bahut kam aatey hain,' says his grandfather ruefully, 'school hamesha bandh rehta hai'. (The teachers come very rarely. The school is always closed.) In fact, any one who can at all afford it and even a few like Diwan Singh's family who can't quite do so, have taken this step. Diwan Singh is in class 3, the most highly educated member in his family. We interviewed him — he loves his school which has plenty of play equipment. His teacher teaches well, though sometimes Diwan Singh does get a beating. The little boy seems excited about his studies and is looking forward to getting a job in the future — the bright lights of the town beckon him. Rупpo, his sister, does not see this bright future. She has to be content with the local government school. Her plight is not uncommon, for private-school enrolment shows a sharp bias in terms of gender as well as class.

strong parental demand develops for these aspects of schooling (as income and education levels in the community increase) that private schools pay attention to them.

Last but not least, the expansion of private schools carries a real danger of further undermining the government schooling system. When parents from a relatively privileged background withdraw their children from government schools to put them in a private school, there is that much less parental pressure to improve government schools. This scenario may lead to a very divisive pattern of schooling opportunities, with better-off parents sending their children to private schools while poorer parents are left to cope with non-functional government schools. Indeed, these divisive patterns are already conspicuous in many areas.

## 8.5. NGO Initiatives

### The role of NGOs

The work of non-government organizations (NGOs) is not the main focus of this report, for two reasons. First, plenty of material on this is available elsewhere. Second, very few villages in the PROBE states (6 out of 188 sample villages) had schooling facilities run by NGOs. The last point is worth noting, because the public visibility of NGOs sometimes gives the false impression that they are everywhere. Following on that, and on the assumption that most NGOs are doing good work, there is a tendency to expect a great deal from them. Government documents, in particular, increasingly refer to NGOs (or to partnership with NGOs) as one of the crucial institutional resources to be tapped in order to achieve universal elementary education. Sometimes they are even seen as a viable, low-cost 'alternative' to government schools. Against this background, it is important to recognize that, as things stand, NGOs actually play a relatively minor role in the education system as a whole.

This remark does not detract from the immense value of their work. Dedicated

NGOs have done wonderful things in specific areas, and their pioneering initiatives have also drawn attention to new models of classroom pedagogy, teacher training, school management, and so on. Further, NGOs can play a crucial advocacy role, and in helping to foster public participation in schooling matters.

In this section, we present three illustrations of this type of work, based on secondary sources. The organizations that feature in these examples (Eklavya in Madhya Pradesh, Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan, and MV Foundation in Andhra Pradesh) have one thing in common, namely a commitment to the universalization of elementary education in a common schooling system. Their work is not a *substitute* for government schools; rather, it tries to support them and to ensure that deprived children are able to join the same schools as other children.

The summaries below are based on material supplied by the organizations concerned, first-hand observation of some of their projects, and independent evaluation reports. We have tried our best to be fair and accurate.

### Eklavya: Improving classroom processes

Eklavya, an NGO involved in primary education for around 20 years, grew out of the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme. The programme faced great problems in the teaching of science at middle-school level due to poor student preparedness at the primary level in both language and mathematics. They had to introduce some chapters on basic mathematics like place-value, decimals and measurement: they had found that the only skill that most children seemed to have mastered at the end of class 5 was simple addition without carry-over. Many children at the end of class 5 would still add 57 and 75 like this :

$$\begin{array}{r} 57 \\ +75 \\ \hline 1212 \end{array}$$

Both multiplication and division were taken as addition by class-5 students, and sums involving fractions and decimals were rarely attempted. Careful observation faulted a child-unfriendly classroom as well as curriculum for this situation. The need was felt to focus more on the primary level.

This was the genesis of Eklavya's effort to develop a new package of teaching-learning materials for classes 1-5. For three years, Eklavya members interacted with children and teachers in a few rural primary schools. They observed the behaviour of the children, their play, their favourite stories and poems, their interaction among friends. All this became the base for innovations in textbooks, teaching aids, classroom activities and teacher training. Teachers were the natural allies of Eklavya in this process and participated in developing materials as well as in using them. The expertise of education professionals was also used as a resource.

Since Eklavya textbooks are the product of interaction with rural children in Madhya Pradesh, textbooks are contextualized to reflect the experience of these children (see pp. 73-4). There is no text for the first half of class 1 so that the child can freely use the local language and slowly begin to feel at home with the standard Hindi spoken in school. In every way the Eklavya classroom is meant to be a non-threatening space. An Eklavya member narrates how the children in a remote village school were too scared to answer the questions put by the visiting resource person, Peepraj Massab. But he persisted and cajoled. He used the few words of Korku (their own language) that he knew. An hour later, the children were laughing and talking freely to Peepraj Massab.

The Eklavya package emphasizes active classrooms with confident and articulate children who enjoy their tasks. Teachers are encouraged to be free of the rigidity of fixed time for learning and adapt the pace to the learners. They are also encouraged to relate the subject matter to the environment of the children. The language in textbooks is simple and close to common speech, not formal and high-flown. Teaching aids include stones, twigs, and

sand found around the classroom, as also the children's own local songs and poems.

**E**klavya feels heartened by the efforts of teachers who are able to assimilate children into classroom activities. When the Eklavya programme began at the slum school at Shukrawara, Saroj Behenji, the teacher, found children peeping in from time to time. These were drop-outs who spent most of their time playing cards outside the school. They were attracted by the unusual activities in the classroom. Saroj Behenji invited them in, telling them that there were different card games in this school. When they joined the class she treated them just like the others. In fact, she gave them more responsibilities as they were older. These children grew up to be fine students, passing the class-5 examination near the top of the class.

**T**he first textbook was ready in 1987, and introduced in seven schools. The process of interaction and experimentation continued. The complete package for classes 1-5 (*Khushi Khushi*), along with supplementary classroom material and a system for teacher support and training, was ready by 1993-4. The experience of

Eklavya in 25 schools was the basis of the trialling programme taken up by Eklavya, Shikshak Samakhya and the Madhya Pradesh SCERT (State Council of Educational Research and Training). Each developed a comprehensive programme for quality improvement in primary schools, and then collaborated to produce a package for quality improvement first in 16 districts and then across the whole state.

In this process, most of the principles on which Eklavya programmes are based (such as the involvement of children and teachers in curriculum and material development, direct interaction of professionals at the field level and the institution of a process of feedback), have become part and parcel of the processes of curriculum development. This has provided the base for interactive processes to take root in primary education. Incorporation of a few units from *Khushi Khushi* was a supplementary fallout. The partnership between the government of Madhya Pradesh and the HSTP (Hoshangabad Science Teaching Project) which began in a small way 25 years ago is now all set to influence the teaching in every primary classroom in the state. Nearly 5,000 teachers,

principals, trainers and administrators have been involved in the work at one time or the other.

## ■ Lok Jumbish: Democratizing educational management

**L**ok Jumbish began with a bold vision: to transform the educational scenario in Rajasthan. Initiated in 1992, it is supported by Sida, the Government of India and the Government of Rajasthan (funded by the three in the ratio 3:2:1).

**O**ne of the main challenges faced by Lok Jumbish was to bring the village community, especially women, into the educational orbit. Another significant challenge was to devise a sound educational management system which would avoid the rigidities and inefficiencies highlighted in chapter 7.

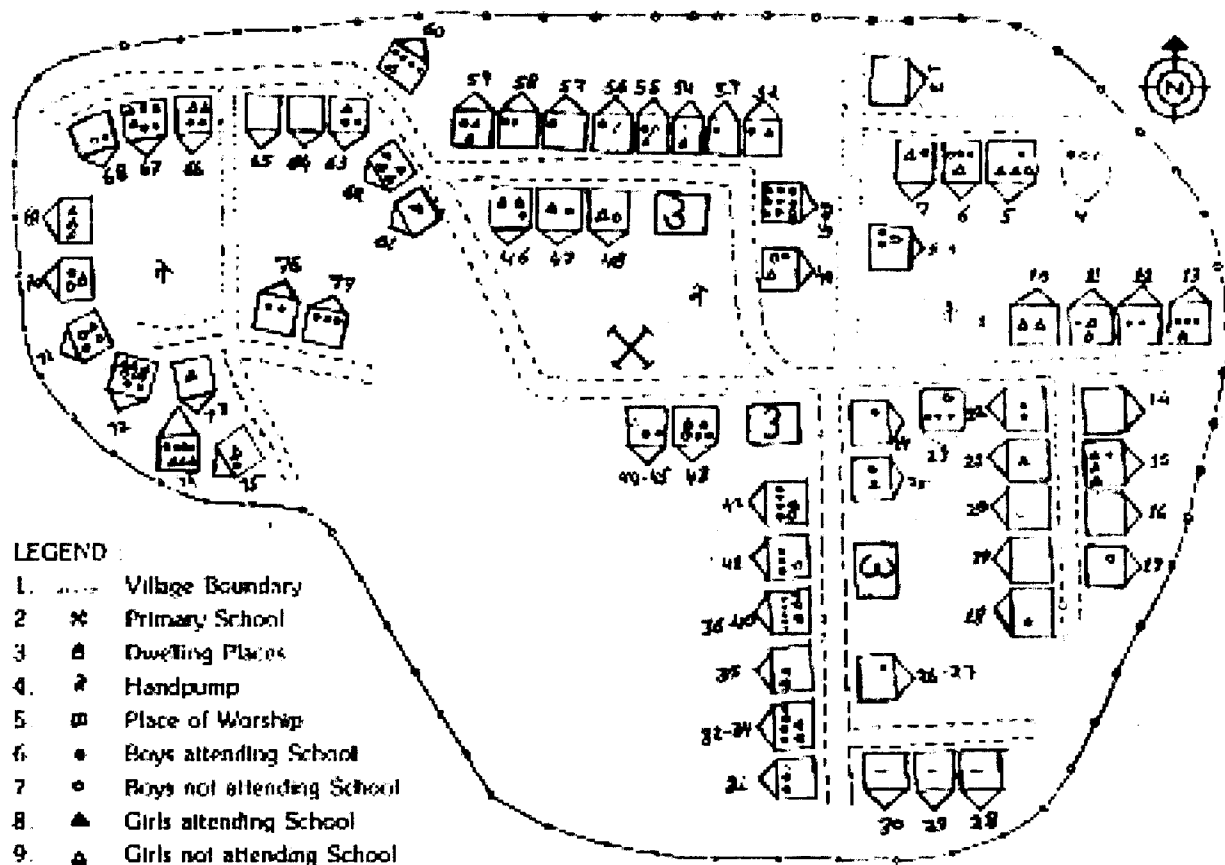
**T**he technique of 'school mapping' is Lok Jumbish's special contribution to the task of mobilizing people for education. This begins with LJ workers (or a local NGO) building a rapport with members of the community who are interested in improving education standards in the village. These members, called the *prerak dal* (inspirational group), are given a short training for the task of mapping, which they undertake along with the LJ workers or the NGO. School mapping refers to the exercise of depicting every household in the village visually on a simple map. Small symbols indicate the schooling status of every household member in the 5-14 age group. The whole exercise is an occasion for interacting with the community. When the map is ready it is possible to see which households need special help, and to discuss the schooling facilities required in the village. The *prerak dal* and the local community draw up a set of proposals based on the mapping data. The proposals usually relate to two issues: the need for new schools and non-formal centres and the improvement of the existing ones. These proposals are sent to a block-level committee which is the sanctioning authority.

*Sturdy once again: a school building repaired by Lok Jumbish. The use of low-cost local materials and innovative technologies, as well as transparent and participatory procedures, are key features of Lok Jumbish.*



ASHOK GROVER

## SCHOOL MAPPING OF VILLAGE TOOT KI DHANI (BALAPURA)



Thus, school mapping allows the ordinary, even non-literate villager to participate in a field survey and make proposals — a tremendous capacity-building exercise. Prompt follow-up to these proposals further builds up the confidence of the community.

Along with school mapping, careful micro-planning at village level makes it possible to monitor the participation of every child in primary education. The LJ culture emphasizes a high degree of autonomy and freedom at the block level. This has fostered a variety of innovative initiatives at the local level. For example, after two or three block officers spent a month at the MV Foundation camps, they proposed setting up residential camps for girls in their own blocks. The initiative has been so well received that there are now sixteen such camps. Another example is Kaman block in Bharatpur which has a

large Muslim population and where many parents used to keep their children (especially girls) at home on the grounds that schooling was not encouraged by the mullahs. Here the block officer sought a dialogue with the mullahs, and found that they had some valid points. They were unsure of sending children to schools of very poor quality, and complained of discrimination against Muslims on the part of local teachers. The mullahs also wanted Urdu to be included in the curriculum. Today 84 of the 120 villages have well-functioning schools which Muslim children attend in large numbers. Successes of this kind often lead to similar initiatives and experiments elsewhere, nurtured by Lok Jumbish's process of continuous evaluation.

Lok Jumbish also stresses the empowerment of women. Along with the *prak dal*, suitable women are identified who

can lead the *mahila samooh* (women's group) in the village and these women become part of all LJ deliberations. It is LJ policy to recruit women workers: two-thirds of the LJ staff are women. There are special facilities for women and young girls who want to educate themselves, but missed the chance. The two WRITES (Women's Residential Institute for Training and Education), for example, have trained many illiterate women. Many of them now work as *anganwadi* workers, NFE instructors, and so on. Several have joined as Lok Jumbish staff.

The Lok Jumbish approach to 'non-formal education', called *sahej shiksha*, is quite different from the mainstream NFE system which is more or less non-functional. The course runs for a full five years, and the child, while free to learn at his or her own pace, is fully supported till class-5 level. Investment per NFE centre

is around Rs 20,000/- per annum (about five times as high as in government NFE centres), and the centres and instructors receive close attention and support.

**L**ok Jumbish, of course, has its problems and weaknesses. Though enrolment and retention have gone up, pupil achievements in LJ schools have been modest. LJ's impact on the mainstream school system has also fallen short of expectations, an important issue since LJ is a temporary project. Even the goal of empowering women has met with partial success (one evaluation found that only a minority of mahilla-samooth members in the sample villages were active). On the whole, the pace of LJ work has been slower than was first envisaged. But this does not detract from the value of what has been achieved. As one independent evaluation report observes, the project has demonstrated 'high sensitivity and a real-life tightrope walking ability'.

## ■ MV Foundation: Removing child labour

**F**ew children of low-income families ever went to school in Shankarapally Mandal, a cluster of around 30 villages near Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh). Apart from

helping their parents at home and in the fields, many children were also employed in income-earning activities. Hordes of little girls could be seen in the *kanakambaram* groves, harvesting the orange flowers and stringing them into garlands. Scores of young boys worked as bonded labourers on the large farms in the district. These children could not dream of school — their families were just too poor.

**S**ince 1987, MV Foundation has been working to make this dream a reality. MVF does not encourage the compromises of the 'non-formal education' (NFE) system, where school timings are adjusted to suit working children. It believes in *breaking* the labouring cycle — the only way to remove child labour is to send children back to school.

**M**VF has different strategies for different age-groups. The simplest to tackle are young children between the ages of five and eight, who are often idle or just help their parents in small ways. These children are young enough to be easily admitted in a formal school, so the task is to convince parents that they should study, and to see that they are admitted. The older children, aged nine to fourteen, are more difficult to tackle. Many of them are hard-core child labourers, already seen as economic assets by their parents.

*Freedom from labour: Former child labourers at a residential summer camp which will enable them to enrol in school.*



**F**or these children, the NFE strategy was tried out. But the centres were not popular. The children who did come made slow progress — they were just too tired, and also very irregular. The NFE centre attracted them only when it became a lively and creative place where the little workers could relax. The centre then became a motivational one, where children were persuaded to join a residential 'summer camp'. These summer camps are the cornerstone of MVF's work.

**S**ummer camps are held separately for girls and boys, and vary in duration from three to nine months. Study timings are rigorous — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. In the evening there are library sessions, review sessions and homework sessions. The children are divided into various committees to organize the day-to-day chores (cleaning utensils, sweeping, etc.). The atmosphere at the camp is joyful in spite of the hectic schedule. Beating is taboo and even a scolding can cause protest at the review sessions. The children do not feel threatened by the level of study: a good example is their first textbook. It is simply a list of thirty common words provided by the children themselves. Song and dance, coins and matchsticks, folklore and proverbs are all used for the serious business of preparing the young learners to join a formal school at the end of the camp. Some of them join class 3, others class 4 and some even class 5.

**T**he children, usually first-generation learners, continue to be supported in their learning. They are admitted into social-welfare hostels. Their local school also has MVF volunteers, who activate the village community to ensure that the school has adequate facilities and that the teachers are accountable. It is not unusual to find two government teachers drawing full salary, the MVF volunteers and two local volunteers (each getting Rs 800 per month), all teaching in one school. This is only one of the strategies by which MVF has succeeded in involving the community and mobilizing committed local volunteers — not as a parallel structure but to *reinforce* the school system.

**M**VF seeks to make creative use of local resources. Its volunteers are idealistic



## MARUSHALAS IN WESTERN RAJASTHAN

The *marushala* (desert school) is an alternative school conceived by URMUL Trust — an NGO working in the deserts of Western Rajasthan. The project began in 1992 and at present there are 6 marushalas.

Western Rajasthan has a low level of literacy, especially among women. Pupil absenteeism peaks at the time of seasonal migration to the *Dhanis* (newly-created hamlets in the command area of the Indira Gandhi Canal), when many children work in the fields. By following the agricultural calendar, the marushala ensures that children are able to study while contributing to family labour. All the marushalas are located in places where no other school exists.

Children from the age of three are admitted to the marushala. However, they are taught only from the age of six. Pupils are taught Hindi, mathematics and environmental science. The syllabus has been designed by Digantar — a Jaipur-based NGO. Digantar also provides support in the form of regular training and evaluation of teachers. Compared to other schools, the marushalas have plenty of teaching aids. The teacher-pupil ratio is also much higher than in ordinary schools.

The children in the marushalas set the work agenda. Though teachers prepare for the following day, they modify the plan according to the preferences expressed by the children. The relationship between children and teachers is one of

camaraderie. The children are trained not to accept anything blindly, and encouraged to be curious and inquisitive. They are not burdened with homework every day. They are given weekly homework, and the syllabus is designed to be easy for them to comprehend.

Learning in marushalas takes place in a relaxed atmosphere. The children look forward to going to school, and often reach there early. They stay long after the school hours are over, playing with other children. No fees are charged, but parents contribute some cash voluntarily. There are no classes in marushalas, but children are graded. The children move from one grade to another depending on their pace of learning. They undergo tests every three months, and the tests are conducted as part of the normal school routine. No special emphasis is laid on the tests, so that children do not dread them.

There is no physical punishment in marushalas, though pupils may be mildly scolded if they disrupt other children's work. The teachers meet the parents regularly in their homes and at school, and inform them of the progress of the children. These meetings also enable the teachers to bring in children who for various reasons do not attend school.

Some parents, however, believe in the dictum that if you spare the rod you spoil the child. Hence they are not comfortable with the marushala philosophy of not punishing the children.

The children who are trained in the marushalas also face an adjustment problem when they move to the formal school system in class 6. Unlike the marushalas the formal school system believes in conformity, physical punishment, and denial of space for the various skills of children. Children who join the formal school after being in the marushalas are often bewildered by this. Also, they are not enthused by rote learning and such. However, children from marushalas perform well in whichever school they join.

Nitya S.



young women and men, themselves from underprivileged social groups. They know the dignity and confidence which formal education can give. Far from dismissing these jobless youth as lumpen elements, MVF relies on their energies to coax the children to school, to run the camps and teach the children, and to ensure that the school system runs properly. Another imaginative use of local resources is the site of the summer camps. These are located in disused government buildings. No permission is sought — MVF simply informs the government that these premises will be put to temporary use.

In the same spirit, parents (even landlords and employers) are somehow persuaded to become friends of the children. Parents are initially nervous and reluctant. Some even threaten to commit suicide. But most have been touched by the joy of their children at the camps. They make adjustments, re-allocate work responsibilities so that the child can continue in school. They are particularly supportive of girls.

### SOME POINTERS FROM THE MVF EXPERIENCE

1. Abolition of child labour and universalization of school education are practically synonymous.
2. Parents of working children are willing to make adjustments to enable their children to go to school.
3. The income of a working child is *not* the motivating factor in most cases for the parents to send their children to work.
4. There is no alternative to using government institutions in order to bring about universalization of education, as NGOs cannot provide the infrastructure on the necessary scale.
5. There is considerable scope for involving the village community in universalizing elementary education.

Shantha Sinha.

It is not that child labour has disappeared from the area. But the movement has caught on. In 1992, a survey by MVF put the number of out-of-school children in Shankarapally Mandal at 5,550 out of a total of 10,661 children aged 5-14. Within two years, MVF had sent 4,190 to schools. MVF has come to the conclusion that poor parents want to send their children to schools, and that even hard-core child workers can be integrated into the school system. The main problem, as MVF sees it, is not economic poverty, but the poverty and half-heartedness of the policy-makers who are blind to the parental demand for schooling. As Shantha Sinha, founder of MV Foundation, puts it:

The existence of child labour has much more to do with the government's own inability, if not reluctance, to provide adequate infrastructure and to motivate parents through systematic extension work than with any desire or compulsion on the part of parents to send their children to work.

## 8.6. Popular Action

### Overcoming isolation

When schools are not up to their expectations, people sometimes take action without waiting to be mobilized by NGOs or government agencies. Popular action can take many forms, from relatively mild steps such as collecting money to build an extra classroom or sending a complaint to the Block Education Officer to more punchy variants such as beating up a lazy teacher (as happened in one PROBE village).

To be realistic, examples of such initiatives are far from abundant. In privileged neighbourhoods, parents do not take things lying down, and know how to pull the right strings. It is not uncommon, for instance, for newspapers to carry letters from middle-class parents who are angry about teaching methods, admission procedures, examination results, and so on. But for parents belonging to deprived areas or communities, making one's voice heard is much harder. The tendency

is to accept the condition of government schools as yet another disadvantage one has to cope with, and, if need be, to opt out rather than fight to improve the system. Until something is done to ensure that the system is more responsive to parental demands, this attitude is likely to persist.

From time to time, however, parents (or children) somehow muster enough energy and hope to act together. Indeed, inspiring examples of popular attempts to challenge the inertia of the schooling system spring up from time to time in the newspapers, and many more go unreported. In this section, we present a few examples of such initiatives. One day, perhaps, more sparks of this kind will light a fire.

### Children on strike

The PROBE survey came across a few cases of drunk teachers. Parents and children seldom know how to handle such teachers, but we did hear one story of imaginative response to this problem.

It happened in Barar (Rajsamand district, Rajasthan), sometime in 1995. This large village has a lively school with 25 teachers and classes from 1 to 10. At that time, however, four teachers used to turn up drunk. They did not teach, and were sometimes found throwing up or lying on the floor. Some of them collected money for liquor from the children, or hinted that those who brought them daru would pass the exams. A written complaint sent by class-10 children to the headteacher (himself very irregular) elicited no response. This drove them to open rebellion.

On D-day, after the morning prayer, the children suddenly rang the bell as if it were time for the school to close. Then they all walked out, shouting '*Sharabi master hai hai* (shame on the drunk teachers)' and other slogans. They held a rally in the village, then proceeded to the panchayat ghar and to the sarpanch's house. One of these teachers was the sarpanch's own husband.

After this, the children sat on National Highway 8 (which goes through Barar), demanding the transfer of the drunk

## LOKSHALA

On a pleasantly warm morning in October 1997, hundreds of people from six villages in Karpi Panchayat, Jahanabad district, Bihar, gathered under a *shamiana* in Karpi village. The area is well-known for violent clashes between organized groups representing class (and also caste) interests of peasants and rural elites. On this day, however, people came for a different purpose. They gathered here to conduct a 'Lok Sansad' (people's parliament) on the status of elementary education in their villages.

Prior to this gathering, local voluntary youth groups had surveyed the government schools in their village and had prepared reports which were now displayed. Except for sarpanchs from neighbouring panchayats, no dignitaries were present. People listened with rapt attention as each report was read out. There was heated debate on the state of the school, low quality of learning, teacher's relationship with children, reasons for high push-out rates, etc.

Specific action points were identified. One of the six villages attracted maximum attention since it was without a school. While the deliberations went on, a slip was delivered to one of the elders by a boy. The elder informed the gathering that a government school teacher, known for his frequent absenteeism, had promised that he would now begin to teach regularly.

Someone pointed out that few women were present in the gathering. A special plea was sent to the women to join the meeting. Soon about fifty *musahar* women (among the lowest castes in Bihar) arrived and participated actively in the discussion. In the end, a Sankalp Patra (a pledge to oneself) was read out. Part of the pledge was that, henceforth, women would be involved in all deliberations.

Around the same time, thousands of kilometres away, at Jahangirpuri, Delhi, 275 slum-dwellers whose children were denied admission into government schools, got together for a Dakhila Utsav (festival of admissions), and presented a common petition to the government sealed with their thumbprints. As a result, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi brought out an order directing schools to admit these children. At Debitola block, Dhubri district, Assam, village youth from 11 panchayats were busy preparing to document the history of their villages as a start-up for the community's intervention for the school curriculum. At a government school classroom at Valmiki Pathar, Karad district, Maharashtra, children were learning from a farm worker (the teacher for the day) how parallel lines can be drawn on acres of land.

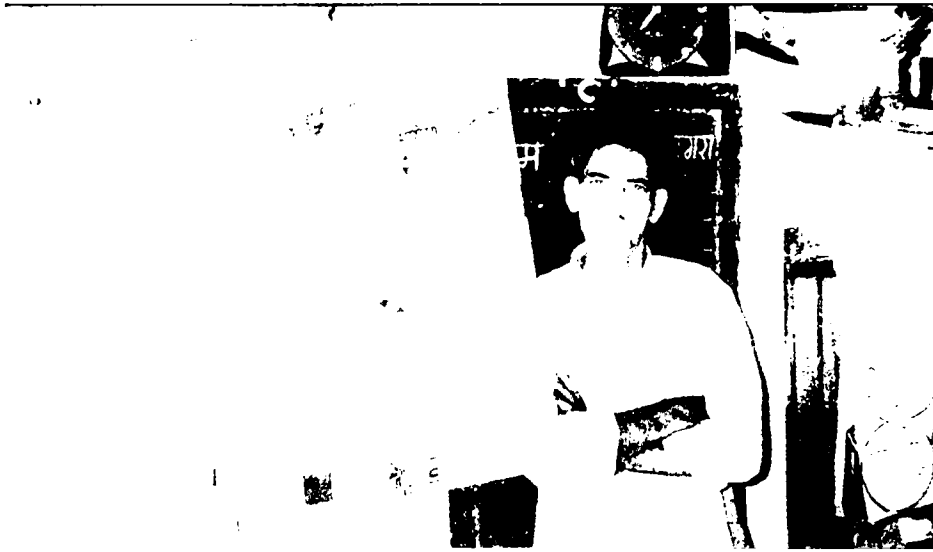
Meanwhile around 12 teachers from various universities in India were engaged in the process of formulating theme papers on a wide range of issues related to these community-based initiatives as part of a UGC fellowship programme. These are just a few examples of Lokshala initiatives to demonstrate an alternative approach to the universalization of elementary education.

Lokshala was initiated in March 1995 by Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha, an all-India people's science network with academic support from Delhi University's Department of Education. It is envisaged as a nation-wide process of social intervention in the government school system. Today, it functions at ten block-level 'advanced field laboratories' in different states, each geo-culturally unique. Each laboratory views all schools of a development block as a subset of the education system from the standpoint of social intervention.

The Lokshala approach is founded on lessons drawn from a whole spectrum of indigenous experiments conducted in the country in recent decades. One of these lessons is that poor parents are keen to send their children to school, as long as the schools provide a satisfactory learning environment. It is a myth that poor parents do not send their children due to lack of awareness of the value of education, or because they are more interested in the money their children can earn from work. Other basic principles of the Lokshala approach are the following:

1. Establishment of a common school system, based on neighbourhood schools (as recommended by the Kothari Commission).
2. Improved access and quality of education will come about only through the systematic intervention of local communities, leading to their active participation in decision-making.
3. The cutting edge of this nation-wide social intervention to transform the government-school system consists of those sections of society whose children do not go to school at all or drop out at an early age.
4. Among these communities women will provide the initiative and leadership for social intervention.
5. The community will participate in the re-construction of the relevant curricula which will be redesigned to reflect the global socio-political reality, and to create a critical consciousness of contemporary issues.
6. The 'world of knowledge' must be related to the 'world of work' in order to make knowledge meaningful and relevant.
7. Learning during the early years must be through the mother tongue for all children, though gradual switching to the standard language of the region may be woven into the curriculum.
8. Lokshala also emphasizes that education is a subset of society and not an independent entity. Therefore the struggle for access to good-quality education for all children is inextricably linked with the struggle against deprivation, undernutrition and ill-health. Fundamental social factors such as persistent disparities, impoverishment and exploitation are ignored only at grave risk to our common aspirations to build a peaceful, just and humane society.

*The Lokshala Team.*



### RETIRED CLERK TURNS DEDICATED TEACHER

Dana Singh is a man with a mission. He has had a hard life: orphaned early, he educated himself with great difficulty, even leaving school more than once. After class 8 he drifted for seven years, doing wage labour and other jobs, and trying to learn by himself in between. Eventually, he managed to pass his Higher Secondary, and to get a job as a peon at the Agricultural University at Bikaner. Later he passed the LDC (Lower Division Clerk) exam, and finally the UDC (Upper Division Clerk) exam.

Twenty-one years later, Dana Singh retired and went back to his village (in southern Rajasthan), where he decided to help deprived children to study. He gives tuitions to high-school pupils, charging Rs 25 per month, and also teaches out-of-school children. Initially he managed on his own, with some help from a retired secondary-school headteacher. Later he received a small grant from a local organization to run a non-formal education centre.

Dana Singh teaches with dedication and enthusiasm. His home, which houses the centre, was built with the school in mind. Imaginative charts, maps and teaching aids (most of them hand-made) brighten the classroom. Each pupil has a colourful card bearing his or her name. On arrival, each child picks up the relevant card and hands it to Dana Singh. This helps to keep attendance records, and to impart a sense of the written word. Children learn to read and write within two years, even though the centre opens only two hours a day.

Dana Singh's centre is popular with the parents. Some children come because they work during school hours, but others are simply drawn by the centre's attractive atmosphere. Some parents let their child study at the centre for a couple of years before enrolling them in the government school, because they know that the child will learn faster with Dana Singh. This year, 31 children from the centre joined the local school in classes ranging from 1 to 4. Out of 27 children currently studying at the centre, 16 are girls.

Like most teachers, Dana Singh complains that parents are not doing enough to send their children to school regularly. But he has a good rapport with them, and on the whole he is heartened by this experience. He also points out that, since his centre started, parents have become far more demanding of the local government school.

teachers — all four of them were absent that day. Many villagers joined them in singing songs and blocking the road. A massive jam built up, stretching for several kilometres on each side. Within half an hour the police arrived, followed later by the Block Development Officer, a senior member of the *zila parishad*, the State Development Officer and, finally (four hours after the sit-in began), the District Education Officer. The DEO promised to transfer the teachers within four days. The pupils called off the strike, but warned that they would resume their agitation if the DEO broke his promise.

Four days later, nothing had happened, so pupils from class 9 and class 10 walked out and blocked the road again. This time the DEO promptly transferred the teachers to four different places. One of them, however, was back within two years, and that too as head of the school.

### ■ Long march to Nasik

Early this year the exploits of some spunky children from a remote region of Maharashtra made headlines in the local newspapers and even appeared on the cover of *India Today*. These tribal children were all inmates of an 'ashram school', a special residential school created under a scheme aimed at the promotion of tribal education. To protest against conditions in their school, 23 children between the ages of 10 and 12 had marched 66 kilometres across hilly terrain to the zonal headquarters at Nasik. Their complaints given below are indicative of the trying conditions under which deprived children are struggling to study:

- the headteacher came only on weekends;
- the watchman ill-treated the children;
- uniforms had not been given;
- for three months, no breakfast had been given to the children, and lunch consisted only of rice and *daal* with one *roti*;
- thirsty children had to walk to a nearby brook, as the school tubewells had stopped functioning three years earlier.

*Youth to the rescue at Badsu. They stepped in to teach the children during a protracted teacher's strike.*



ANAL SHAH

The children were happy with the outcome of their protest. Uniforms and water supply had been promised, a new headteacher appointed and the watchman suspended. Vegetables were beginning to show up on the menu. 'The rice is finally being cleaned before it is cooked,' commented little Heeru Bhoje, aged 10. Her schoolmate, who had been waiting almost a whole year for a teacher, was happy that a new one had been appointed.

## ■ Alternative schooling in Badsu

All over Uttar Pradesh, in August this year, the younger children were a little confused. They felt that they had been away from school for a long, long time. One little boy even told us confidently that he was a dropout — he had left school a long time ago. In fact, this prolonged break was simply due to the teachers' strike, which started at the end of the summer vacation. And the strike showed no sign of coming to an end.

Yet the primary school in Badsu (Muzaffarnagar, U.P.) was more lively than ever. Eight young men, with qualifications ranging from class 8 to MA BEd, had decided that while teachers and the government sorted out their differences they would help the children to continue studying. The pupils were sitting in neat rows on the verandah, outside the locked classrooms, working studiously. There was order and discipline, and the youth

claimed that the school had not seen so much activity for a long time. They had been inspired by an appeal from the Chief Minister, who asked educated youth to help stranded pupils during the strike.

These are just a few examples of actions taken by ordinary people to challenge the inertia of the schooling system. To facilitate such initiatives, there is an urgent need to improve the responsiveness of the education administration to parental demands. The first requirement of more active popular involvement in schooling matters is a sense that change is possible.

# 9

## CHAPTER NINE

# the schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh



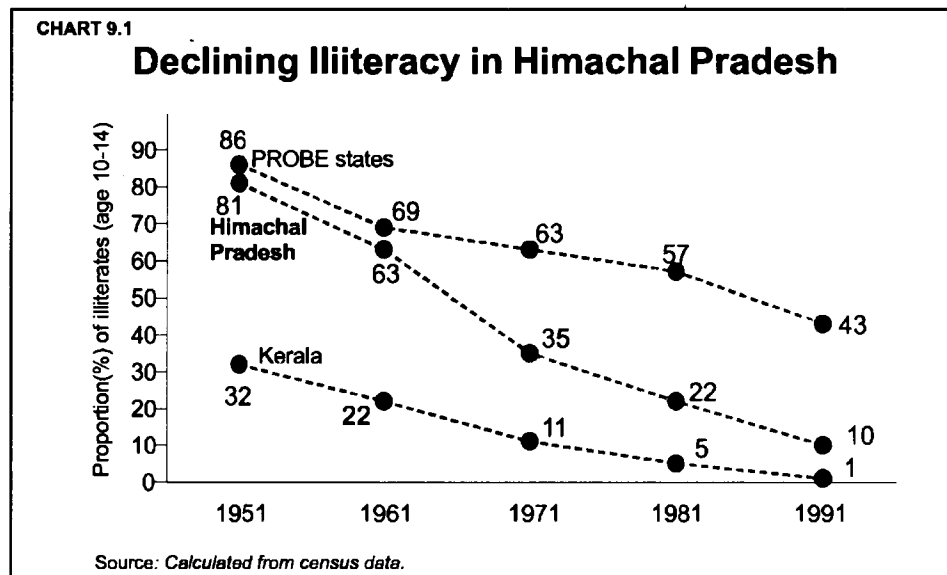
### 9.1. What Happened?

**N**ot so long ago, Himachal Pradesh was considered as a 'backward' region of north India. This view, for instance, often comes up in the Report of the States Reorganization Commission, published in 1955, which called for sympathetic consideration of the demands of 'the extremely backward and exploited people of this

state'. In those days, literacy rates in Himachal Pradesh (21 per cent for males and 9 per cent for females, as per the 1961 census) were *below* the corresponding all-India averages. Since then, however, the state has been making spectacular progress in elementary education (Chart 9.1). In 1991, literacy rates in the 10-14 age group were as high as 94 per cent for males and 86 per cent for females. Further rapid progress has been achieved during the last seven years, bringing the state very close to universal primary

education. The only other states with higher rates of school attendance are Goa and Kerala.

In several ways, the progress of elementary education has been even more impressive in Himachal Pradesh than in Kerala or Goa. First, the transition from mass illiteracy to near-universal primary education has taken place over a much shorter period of time in Himachal Pradesh. Second, educational expansion in Himachal Pradesh has been based almost entirely on government schools, with relatively little contribution from private institutions. Third, Himachal Pradesh has an unfavourable settlement pattern, with small villages scattered over large areas (e.g. one-third of the rural population lives in villages with a population of less than 300). Fourth, child labour used to play an important role in Himachal Pradesh's economy, due *inter alia* to the dependence of many households on environmental resources and to the fact that a high



proportion of adult women work outside the household.

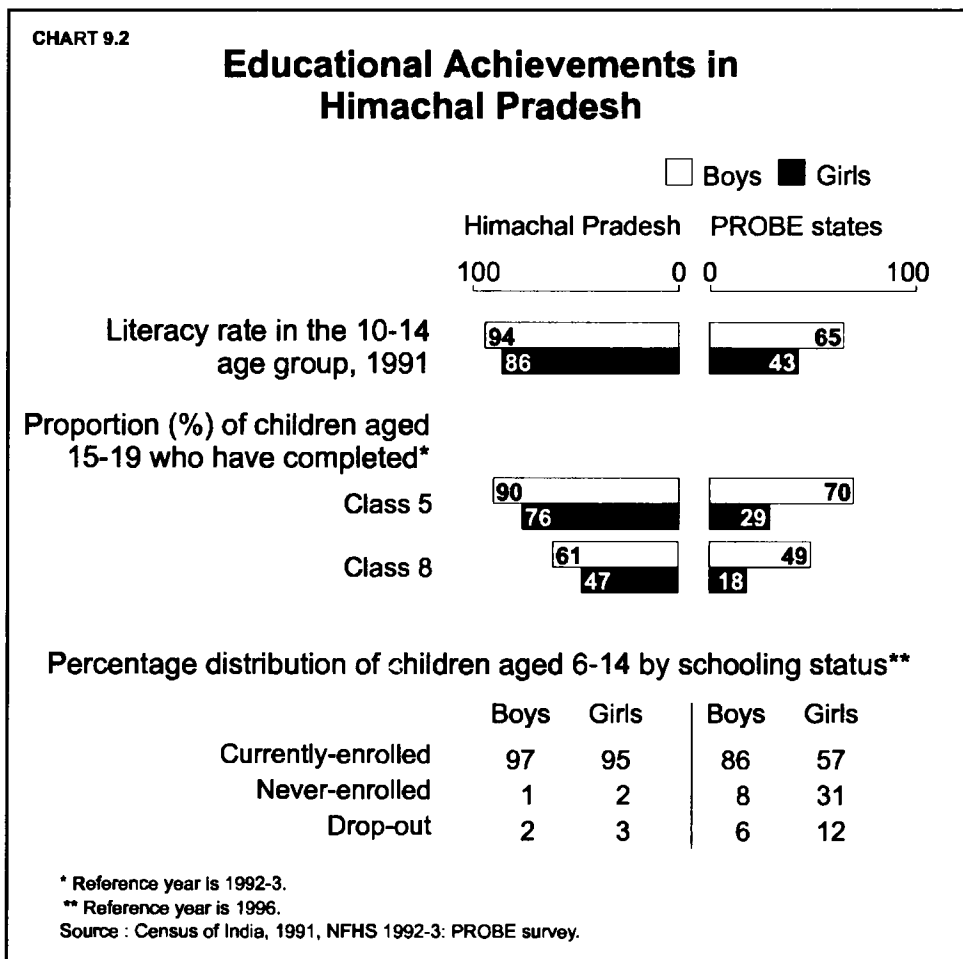
The PROBE survey found plenty of evidence of the rapid progress of schooling

in Himachal Pradesh. In this state, 48 villages (located in seven different districts) were surveyed, and 154 households were interviewed. Among 285 children aged 6-12 in the sample households, only five had never been to school, and the proportion currently attending school was as high as 97 per cent for boys and 95 for girls. As Chart 9.2 illustrates, these high levels of school attendance are consistent with secondary data. The latter also point to low socio-economic disparities in access to elementary education.

## 9.2. Instant Explanations

When presented with these facts, many commentators claim to have a ready explanation. Examples of instant explanations are: many people in Himachal Pradesh have a job in the army; Himachal Pradesh receives a lot of assistance from the central government; income levels in Himachal Pradesh are relatively high; and so on. All these observations are correct, but on their own they hardly 'explain' the schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh in all its aspects.

To illustrate, consider the 'army jobs' explanation. If this were such a powerful factor of educational expansion, one would expect to find high literacy rates in,



say, Jhunjhunu (Rajasthan) — the district where the proportion of men employed in the army is the highest in India. Contrary to this prediction, illiteracy is endemic in Jhunjhunu, where, for instance, *three-fourths* of all women aged 7 and above are unable to read or write. As for the 'high income levels' explanation, it suggests that Punjab should be well ahead of Himachal Pradesh in educational matters. Here again, the prediction backfires: the incidence of illiteracy among boys aged 10-14 is more than three times as high in Punjab as in Himachal Pradesh.

This is not to deny that army recruitment or high incomes can help to spread literacy. But to explain Himachal Pradesh's progress on that basis alone requires a faith in the power of employment and income effects that is simply not borne out by any evidence (note also the educational breakthrough, which goes back to the nineteen-sixties, has largely *preceded* rather than followed the economic take-off). Further, some aspects of Himachal Pradesh's success would be hard to explain in those terms at all, e.g. the remarkably low gender bias in school attendance at the primary level (army jobs are a non-starter here). As we shall see in the next section, the schooling situation in Himachal Pradesh has many other features that defy instant explanation.

### 9.3. Some Field Observations

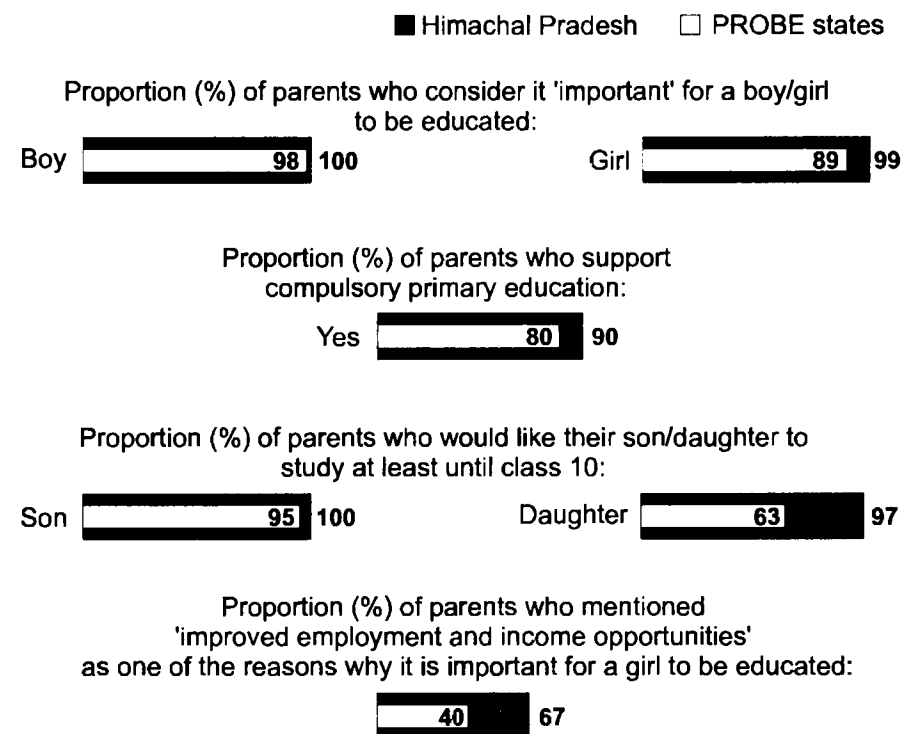
The PROBE investigators who worked both in Himachal Pradesh and in other north Indian states had a great deal to say about the contrast between the two regions. To give you an idea of this contrast, this section revisits the ground covered in chapters 3-7 (in the same order), and spells out various ways in which the schooling situation in Himachal Pradesh appears to be positively different.

#### Schooling and the family

*High motivation:* The PROBE investigators were struck by the exceptionally high level of parental motivation for

CHART 9.3

### Parents' Attitudes to Education: Himachal Pradesh



Source : PROBE survey.

education in Himachal Pradesh. Most parents take it for granted that schooling is an essential part of every child's upbringing, and have ambitious hopes for their own children's education. The reasons for wanting children to go to school also show a broader understanding of the value of education than in other states. Many parents, for instance, perceptively explained how education helps a person to stand for panchayat elections, do bank work, travel anywhere without fear, and generally to participate with confidence in modern society.

**'Ladki ka darja hamare desh mein kuchh bhi nahin hai. Ladki padh-likhkar samaj mein apne adhikar prapt kar sakti hai. (Girls have a very low status in our country. If a girl studies she can claim her rights in society.)'**

*A father in Kapoti (Hamirpur district).*

*Social consensus:* In contrast with the situation in the other states, where practical expectations from the schooling system vary between different communities, the passion for education in Himachal Pradesh is widely shared. People consider schooling to be important not only for their own children but for *all* children. Most parents support compulsory education, not only at the elementary level but even — in many cases — up to class 10.

**'Education is very important. It should not be left to the parents to leave their children uneducated. All children should go to school.'**  
*Roop Chand, a poor Harijan farmer from Dughilag (Kullu district).*

**'Education should be made compulsory. Children may not realize the importance of education.'**  
*A poor labourer from Chanon (Kullu district).*



***'[If primary education is made compulsory], no person will be left illiterate.'***

*A seventeen-year old girl from a poor scheduled-caste family, who studies in class 9 in Ner (Mandi district).*

**Low gender bias:** Unlike in other states, parents in Himachal Pradesh have ambitious educational goals even for *girls*. 'Girls have the same capabilities as boys,' was typical of the attitude of rural parents. The gender bias in school attendance is very low at the primary level, and rapidly declining at the upper-primary level. Educational aspirations for girls are high (Chart 9.3), and much closer to the corresponding aspirations for boys than in other states. Nor do these aspirations remain empty abstractions or vain hopes: in the 13-18 age group, the proportion of girls attending school is as high as 73 per cent, compared with 32 per cent in the PROBE states. Even among economically or socially disadvantaged families, it is common for adolescent girls to go to school.

The *reasons* for wanting to educate daughters are also different in Himachal Pradesh. Here, a daughter's education is not seen just through the prism of marriage. Improving her prospects of getting a good job is another common motive, reflecting the high involvement of Himachali women in employment outside

### **Even eldest daughters in poor families go to school**

Suman, a seventeen-year old girl from Batran (Hamirpur district), is currently enrolled in class 11. Her father, a blacksmith (*lohar*) who makes iron tools, dropped out after class 4. Her mother has had even less schooling. The family does wage labour, for which they are paid in cash and kind. In spite of the family's meagre resources, Suman and her two younger siblings (Vipin in class 8 and Sushma Devi in class 6) all go to school.

the home. Parents also have a concern for their daughters' well-being after marriage, and a sense that education would contribute to it ('an educated daughter has a better chance to improve her life after marriage,' said one poor labourer).

***'Ladki ki jivan mein kaafi samasyaen aati hain. Agar veh padhi hogi to in sab ko asani se suljha sakti hai.***

*(There are many problems in a woman's life. If she is educated she can solve them more easily.)'*

*A mother in Ner (Mandi district).*

***'Ladki atma-nirbhar hogi. Kisi ke bharose nahin rahegi.***

*(She will become self-confident. She will not be dependent on others.)'*

*A mother from a poor family in Batran (Hamirpur district). Her four daughters are all going to school.*

***'Educated girls are more demanding but it is important to educate them. They can learn some trade.'***

*(An upper-caste parent in Chanon, Kullu district).*

Even the marriage considerations are somewhat different in Himachal Pradesh. As in other states, a majority of parents (79 per cent) took the view that a daughter's education facilitates her marriage. But the perceived reasons why educated brides are in high demand are somewhat different in Himachal Pradesh. For instance, they include a positive social valuation of the employment opportunities of educated women.

***'Agar ladki padhi hogi to ladke vale yeh dekhenge ki yeh kahin bhi naukari karke apna va doosron ka pet bhar sakti hai.***

*(If a girl is educated, the boy's family will see that she can get a job anywhere and support both herself and others.)'*

*A mother in Uperi Baheli (Mandi district).*

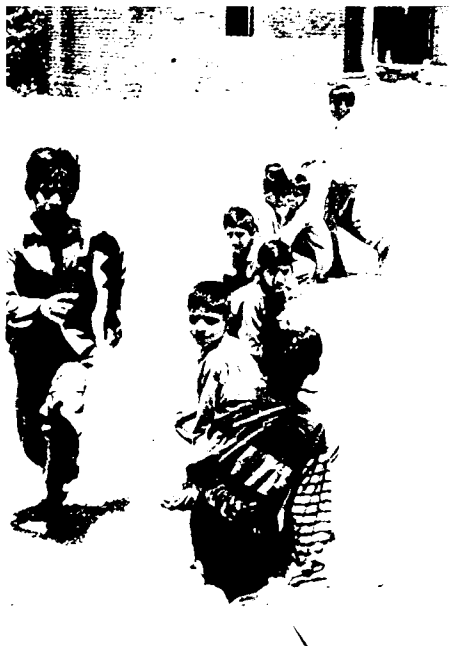
Similarly, among those who felt that education makes a daughter's marriage more difficult, higher dowry (the main concern elsewhere) was not the only issue. Some respondents, for instance, commented that an educated daughter becomes more 'choosy' in matrimonial matters. As one Harijan mother put it, 'it is more difficult to get an educated girl

married because an educated daughter is more particular — she wants to be married into a good house or to someone of her choice.' Incidentally, the greater assertiveness of educated daughters was not always viewed in a negative light — far from it. One parent took the positive view that 'an educated daughter can get a good match, and can also think for herself whether a particular home suits her'.

***'An educated daughter's marriage is more expensive. But a good marriage gives much happiness to her parents.'***

**Supportive attitude:** Himachali parents tend to have a responsible and supportive attitude towards their children's schooling. Education ranks high among their spending priorities (one parent even stated that, if needed, he would sell land to educate his children). At home, children's studies receive much attention, not only from parents but often from other relatives too. Parents also tend to have a fairly supportive attitude towards teachers. As elsewhere, they often have complaints of various kinds against the local teachers, but this does not stand in the way of mutual cooperation.

*In H.P., sports — rarely mentioned in other states — are a common school activity.*



SONDEEP SHANKAR

## A MODEL SCHOOL

Visiting the school in Ner (Mandi district) was a memorable experience for the PROBE survey team. When the investigators arrived, the three teachers present were actively teaching. Children were sitting peacefully and listening to them.

The teachers spoke affectionately about the children. When we interviewed the class-I teacher, she was very open, and showed a sharp understanding of child development. She was also confident of her pupils' achievements, and said we could question the children if we liked. The children's responses indicated high learning achievements and self-confidence.

Twelve-year old Om Prakash (from a poor dalit family struggling to make ends meet) is in class 5. He told the team, '*School jane mein maja aata hai. Aur naukari ke liye padhna jaroori hai* (I enjoy going to school. And it is also necessary for me to study to get a job).' Om Prakash is proud to represent his school in the district-level games.

The atmosphere was conducive to learning. To their amazement, the investigators found that every time the bell rang to signal the end of a class, the children were given five minutes to wander around — an innovative and child-friendly practice. The school had a number of story books in its small library, frequently borrowed by the children.

The teacher felt that parents had a positive attitude towards the school and were mindful of their children's needs. The parents, for their part, were full of appreciation for her and for the school. '*Adhyapika bachhon ka poora dhyan rakhti hain* (the teacher takes full care of the children),' said one. '*Hamein koi shikayat nahin* (we have no complaints),' concluded another. Ner certainly has a school of which not just Himachal but the entire country can be proud.

**Child self-confidence:** Compared with their peers elsewhere, Himachali children impressed several PROBE investigators with their self-confidence and high spirits. The children often spoke to them with assurance, proudly showing their school-books or displaying their knowledge. Most of them read and wrote fluently (and we found no case of a school-going child remaining illiterate). Often they had ambitious plans for the future. All this applied even to girls, some of whom mentioned their hope to become a teacher or a doctor.

***'Khelne ke acche avsar milte hain. Adhyapika shabashi deti hain. (In school we get the opportunity to play. And the teacher also praises me.)'***

*Anil Kumar from Uperi Baheli (district Mandi).*

## ■ The school environment

**Orderly premises:** From one point of view, the physical infrastructure of village schools in Himachal Pradesh is no better than elsewhere. The facilities are minimal, especially in small hamlets, where a school often looks much the same (at first sight) as the typical village school in Bihar or Uttar Pradesh. And the average distance from home to school remains much *higher* in Himachal Pradesh than elsewhere, due to the adverse settlement pattern. On the positive side, school facilities in Himachal Pradesh tend to be better maintained and utilized. School premises are usually tidy, in some cases even attractive. Also, there is much less dilapidation of school furniture and teaching material. A significant proportion of schools in Himachal Pradesh even succeed in making active use of relatively fragile items such as electric fans, musical instruments and library books. In other states, these facilities are seldom functional, when they exist at all.

## INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Unlike in other states, many of the children in Himachal Pradesh were able to describe teaching activity inside the classroom. Although there was a lot of emphasis on *copying from the black-board or textbooks* (and some parents made the perceptive observation that this teaching method is overused), there was also reading by the teacher and by different children. The impression that emerges from these accounts is one of a functioning classroom. Here are some examples of how the children themselves, some only six years old, described the previous day's mathematics and Hindi classes:

- The teacher wrote the numbers 1-100 on the board and the children copied them on their slates.
- The teacher wrote sums on the board and the children had to do them in their books. Then the teacher checked their books.
- The children were asked to write the numbers 1-100 on their slates.
- The teacher read a poem in Hindi and the children repeated it.
- The teacher read from the Hindi textbook and the children repeated what he said.
- The teacher read from the Hindi textbook, then different children read the lesson aloud. Then the teacher did the questions and answers on the blackboard.
- The teacher read from the Hindi textbook; then the 'monitor' read the lesson aloud and the children were asked to answer the questions at home.

In Uperi Baheli (Mandi), the children have games and drill for an hour every day. The children are also taught singing and needlework. In several schools, the children mentioned that one of the reasons they like going to school is that they get a chance to take part in sports. The best evidence of a lively classroom is the fact that the children are so positive about their school experience.



SANJAL BHATTACHARYA

*Better staffing:* A more crucial aspect of the schooling infrastructure in Himachal Pradesh is that village schools tend to be relatively well staffed. The average primary school has more than three teachers. Single-teacher schools, very common in the past, have virtually disappeared (the remaining single-teacher schools consist mainly of newly-created schools where only two or three grades are operational). Similarly, the pupil-teacher ratio in the sample villages is only 27, as against 50 for the PROBE states.

*Accurate records:* Village schools in Himachal Pradesh have well-maintained records, including accurate enrolment and attendance registers. In most schools, the day's attendance figures are written on a blackboard fixed on the outer wall. The importance of these practices (rarely observed in the other states) was discussed in chapter 7. On a similar note, incentive schemes such as scholarships and prizes seem to be efficiently implemented in most schools.

*Higher activity:* The problem of low classroom activity (see chapter 4) seems to be less acute in Himachal Pradesh. For instance, we found comparatively little evidence of practices such as closing a school without good reason, allowing classroom chaos to undermine any learning activity, and leaving younger children to their own devices.

*More 'exemplary' schools:* Not every school in Himachal Pradesh is a roaring

success — far from it. Yet, the PROBE investigators did notice many more 'exemplary' schools in Himachal Pradesh than elsewhere. Similarly, exemplary teachers such as Sem and Anjali (see chapter 5) seem to be relatively easy to find in Himachal Pradesh.

## ■ Teachers and society

*Work culture:* On the whole, teachers in Himachal Pradesh have a responsible attitude towards school duties. The problem of teacher inertia, so devastating in other states (see chapter 5), is not entirely absent in Himachal Pradesh, but it is much less widespread. Various indications of this are implicit in the preceding observations, from better utilization of infrastructural facilities to more accurate school records and higher classroom activity.

*Concern for children:* Going beyond minimal standards of responsibility, some teachers in Himachal Pradesh showed an unusual degree of commitment to the progress of their pupils. Genuine interest in pedagogy, for instance, was not uncommon. Another example came from a teacher who explained that he always taught mathematics early in the morning, when children are most alert. Generally, the organization of a school in Himachal Pradesh gives the impression of being oriented to the needs of the pupils as much as to the convenience of the teachers.

*Female teachers:* In the sample schools, 41 per cent of the teachers were female, compared with only 21 per cent in the other states. This pattern, confirmed by secondary data, is all the more remarkable given that the problems of residence and commuting for female teachers (see section 5.3) are, if anything, potentially more serious in Himachal Pradesh. Interestingly, few female teachers in that state expressed the sense of insecurity or hostility often found elsewhere. This fits with the state's low crime rates and long tradition of women's work outside the household.

*'If the government does not provide any facilities, we get them by collecting funds from the parents. Once we have 30 per cent, the government provides 70 per cent. Sometimes the parents give the total amount. The parents have already contributed to getting equipment for the school. They are willing to make more rooms in the school.'*

*A teacher in Batran (Hamirpur district), where the school has an active PTA.*

*Positive rapport with parents:* In contrast with the antagonistic patterns of teacher-parent relations often found in other states

*Teachers in Himachal Pradesh have comparatively positive attitudes towards female pupils.*

(see section 5.5), we noticed a good deal of positive interaction between parents and teachers in Himachal Pradesh. While complaints do exist on both sides, there is also much mutual understanding, and even practical cooperation. In several villages, for instance, parents have helped to build extra classrooms for the village school.

### ■ Administrative matters

Even in terms of the administrative issues discussed in chapter 7, Himachal Pradesh is doing quite well. Briefly, the management of the education system seems to be comparatively responsible, efficient, and responsive to the needs of teachers and children. To illustrate: (1) very few teaching posts are vacant (in the other states, more than 10 per cent of the posts sanctioned are vacant); (2) salaries are paid punctually on the first day of each month (in Bihar, irregular payment of salaries is a major issue); (3) the school calendar is adjusted district-wise in tune with the agricultural cycle, to avoid clashes with periods of high demand for child labour (e.g. the apple-picking season in Kullu district); (4) there is a Board examination at the end of class 5; (5) school inspectors do not confine their attention to the registers (some even enquire about the health of children); (6) the PROBE

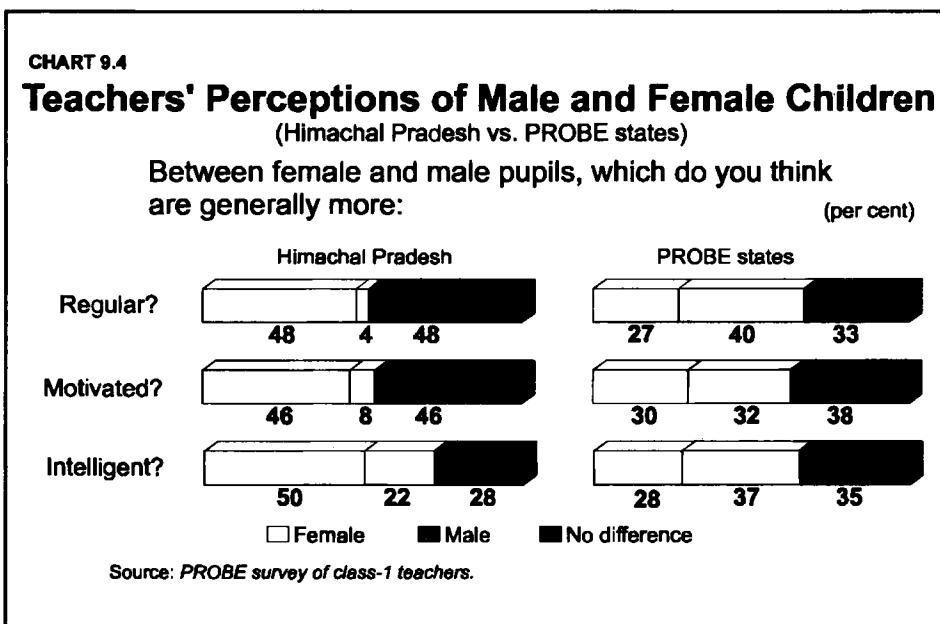
survey encountered no case of corruption in school incentive programmes.

We end by noting the virtual absence of private schools in rural areas of Himachal Pradesh. This vacuum is not due to the absence of purchasing power among parents, which tends to be higher in Himachal Pradesh than in the PROBE states. Rather, it fits in a general pattern mentioned in the preceding chapter: private schools are most common in areas where government schools do not function. Conversely, if government schools function well, there may be little scope for private schools, as seems to be the case in rural Himachal Pradesh. In this connection, it is worth noting that Himachali parents seem to have an unusual faith in government schools. Some of them even assert that, given the choice (and assuming costs to be the same), they would rather put their child in a government than in a private school. And private schools in rural Himachal Pradesh, where they do spring up, seem to be constrained to provide quality education (rather than just substitute for collapsing government schools). Ramshackle coaching centres, so common elsewhere, have no takers.

## ■ 9.4. The Foundations of Success

The schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh is likely to have deep social and political roots. The sweeping contrasts identified in the preceding section are not just the reflection of a particular policy initiative, even less of some specific 'scheme' or 'campaign'. Understanding the schooling situation in Himachal Pradesh calls for a broad perspective, going well beyond the instant explanations mentioned earlier.

To illustrate this point, consider the issue of gender bias. All the 'reasons' given by parents elsewhere for withdrawing their daughters from school early on (e.g. onset of puberty, demands of domestic work, absence of upper-primary school in the



## GENDER RELATIONS AND SCHOOLING: HIMACHAL PRADESH VS. HARYANA

Himachal Pradesh and Haryana present an interesting contrast. Economic conditions in these two states are quite similar, but gender relations differ a great deal. To help understand this contrast, and how it affects girls' schooling, I conducted detailed interviews with 38 mothers in Manhendranagar district (Haryana), and another 38 mothers in Solan and Sirmaur districts (Himachal Pradesh). Here are some findings and impressions from these interviews:

1. In both states, the mothers interviewed were unanimous in saying that education was important for girls. One motive, particularly common in Himachal Pradesh (H.P.), is that educated girls are likely to find better jobs: 36 out of 38 respondents in H.P. expected their daughters to work outside the home after marriage. In both states, education was also considered to have value in itself: educated women were said to have more independence, greater self-confidence, and more freedom to move outside the village. In Haryana (where two-thirds of the respondents had no other occupation than household work), women often mentioned that education improves marriage prospects, and helps mothers to run a household.

*Gender relations are very unequal in Haryana, with women having little say in household decisions.*



2. Only 3 of the respondents' daughters had never been to school. All 3 lived in Haryana. Maternal literacy was higher in H.P. than in Haryana, even though literacy rates in the preceding generation (i.e. the respondents' own mothers) were similar. This confirms that the expansion of schooling has been more rapid in Himachal Pradesh. H.P. mothers were also more knowledgeable about schooling matters than their counterparts in Haryana. The latter only had a vague idea of the functioning of the local school (e.g. how many days it had been open in the preceding week).

3. School facilities were not very different in the two states (though average distance from home to school is higher in Himachal Pradesh). Teaching standards, however, seem to differ. For instance, in Haryana several mothers complained that teachers spent time playing cards or knitting during school hours.

4. Marriage customs in both states are similar in many respects (e.g. practice of dowry and patrilocal residence). But there are a few noticeable contrasts. Almost all Haryana mothers consider it preferable for a young couple to live with the husband's joint family, but less than half of H.P. mothers share that view. Similarly, 26 out of 38 respondents in Haryana would like their daughter to marry before the age of twenty-one, but only 9 mothers in H.P. feel the same. Again, the idea that a daughter might marry someone with less education than herself was considered unthinkable in Haryana, but quite acceptable in H.P. Most striking is the difference in relations between parents and daughters after marriage. Thirteen mothers in H.P. had seen their parents ten times or more during the preceding two years, compared with only four mothers in Haryana.

5. Generally, I found less inequality between men and women in H.P. than in Haryana. Mothers in H.P. have more say in household decisions. This applies in particular to education: many mothers in Haryana had no idea of the cost of schooling, and considered this to be their husband's business. One woman in Haryana prefaced most of her responses with 'my husband thinks...'. The power of parents-in-law in the household was also much greater in Haryana than in H.P.

In Haryana, the hold of patriarchal values pervaded women's own outlook. In response to a question about the age at which a daughter should be married, one mother bluntly said: 'Daughters are a burden — the sooner you get rid of them, the better.'

*Marie-Eve Bondroit.*

village) are equally applicable in Himachal Pradesh. Yet, these alleged obstacles have somehow been blasted away over a short period of time. This achievement can be understood only in the context of very different gender relations in Himachal Pradesh, which include a higher participation of women in the labour force as well as in social life, a closer link between adult women and their parents after marriage, women's greater freedom of movement outside the home, more symmetric patterns of marriage transactions, and so on. When a little girl in a remote village of Himachal Pradesh proudly says that she wants to 'become a doctor', she is making a far-reaching statement about the position of women in society.

**A** complete analysis of the foundations of Himachal Pradesh's success is beyond the scope of this report. Indeed, the

*Both roads and schools have received high priority from the state government.*



SONDEEP SHANKAR

puzzle is not entirely resolved. Some useful insights, however, do emerge from the PROBE survey.

## ■ Official commitment

**P**art of the credit certainly goes to the state government. Development planning in Himachal Pradesh has included a consistent emphasis on developing the rural infrastructure, with roads and schools receiving high priority. Public policy also involves an explicit commitment to the rapid expansion of education, sorely lacking in the other states of north India. One symptom of this commitment is the high level of per-capita expenditure on education, which is about twice the all-India average. Correspondingly, the teacher-child ratio is also better: about twice as high in Himachal Pradesh as in India as a whole. This has greatly helped to ensure that the school environment is conducive to teaching and learning.

**A**nother explicit policy objective is the reduction of inter-regional disparities in development indicators, including educational levels. This has led to high investment in the remote tribal districts (e.g. Kinnaur, Lahul and Spiti), which have caught up remarkably fast with the rest of the state. There is an interesting parallel here with Kerala, where the elimination of regional disparities also became a major goal of public policy after 1947, enabling Malabar to catch up rapidly with Travancore and Cochin. In the same vein, government intervention in Himachal Pradesh has played a key role in the removal of socio-economic disparities in access to education. For instance, there are many incentive schemes for disadvantaged pupils, including free textbooks until class 10 for

scheduled-caste and scheduled-tribe children. All this is in sharp contrast with the gross neglect of 'backward areas' and disadvantaged communities in many other states.

**T**he quality of education management in Himachal Pradesh, mentioned earlier, is another symptom of political commitment to the expansion of education. Realistic goals were set, and pursued with determination. For instance, when Operation Blackboard declared war on single-teacher schools, Himachal Pradesh took the lead: the proportion of such schools tumbled from 28 per cent in 1986 to less than 2 per cent in 1995. Similarly, the official goal of giving priority to women in teacher appointments has been taken seriously in Himachal Pradesh. In other states, there are amazing contradictions between official rhetoric and practical action.

**T**he state government's initiatives have been helped by a generous dose of financial aid from the central government. This observation, however, does not detract from the crucial role of these initiatives in promoting education. The fact that the government of Himachal Pradesh has made full use of this assistance is also to its credit. In other states (notably Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), financial assistance for education from the central government is routinely underutilized.

## ■ Parental demand

**W**hile the state government has played a leading role in the *provision* of school facilities all over Himachal Pradesh, the effective *utilization* of these facilities owes much to the parents. Many of them had to walk long distances in their own childhood to reach the nearest school, if a school was available at all. When schools started springing up in their own village, they promptly seized this new opportunity for their children. Initially at least, the main motive for sending children (mainly boys) to school was the prospect of better jobs, enhanced by the 'demonstration effect' of army recruits and other government employees. With incomes growing quite rapidly, education also became more affordable. Indeed, household spending

on education is much higher in Himachal Pradesh than in the PROBE states.

What is remarkable, however, is how these favourable conditions soon led to an explosion of educational aspirations, spreading *throughout* the society. After all, similar conditions also applied in Punjab and Haryana, but with more limited results.

One possible reason why parental motivation in Himachal Pradesh has spread so rapidly is that the village schools function relatively well. As a result, education is not a mirage but a realistic hope. The 'discouragement effect', so destructive in other states (see chapter 3), has not taken root. Instead, Himachal Pradesh has benefited from a virtuous circle of active state intervention, high parental interest and decent teaching standards.

Another helpful factor is the relatively homogeneous nature of the village society in Himachal Pradesh (see Box, p. 125).

*Even in remote areas, most schools are functional.*



SAMAL BHATTACHARYA

The point is not that hill villages are 'egalitarian', but rather that the divisions of class, caste and gender are less intense than elsewhere, and leave scope for a sense of village solidarity. This particular aspect of the social structure has far-reaching implications for the progress of schooling. It means, for instance, that the social influence of 'role models' (such as army recruits) is not confined to specific castes or classes: if someone in the village gets a good job, it gives a sense of possibility to the whole community. A relatively homogeneous social structure may also facilitate the emergence of consensual social norms, such as education being an essential part of every child's upbringing. By contrast, in divided and factionalized village societies, educational aspirations and opportunities are often sharply compartmentalized on the basis of class, caste and gender.

The sense of village community has another positive aspect of great importance: it fosters the notion that the local school is *everyone's* school. This is one reason why village schools in Himachal Pradesh do not become dysfunctional so easily: if the school stops functioning, the whole village community has a stake in solving the problem. This is quite different from a situation where privileged families solve the problem for themselves by sending their children to private schools. A divisive situation of this kind, where some families enjoy private schooling while others in the same village are deprived of schooling facilities, seems to be socially less acceptable in Himachal Pradesh than elsewhere in north India.

## ■ Civic cooperation

In Himachal Pradesh, the PROBE investigators

observed quite a few examples of collective initiative to improve the local school. This took the form both of cooperative action among parents as well as of cooperation between parents and teachers. As noted earlier, for instance, in many villages parents had helped to build extra classrooms in the local school. Other examples include supplying wood in the winter, helping to level the playground, donating money to improve the school building, and even paying for electric fans.

These examples of civic cooperation also throw some light on the reasons why the schooling system seems to be more accountable in Himachal Pradesh, even when the formal management rules are the same as elsewhere. We were intrigued, for instance, to find relatively well-functioning schools even in remote villages where no inspector had reached for months or even years. It seems to be the vigilance of parents, and their ability to keep the local teachers and administrators on their toes, that keeps the system going. The role of parental vigilance as an accountability mechanism takes a conspicuous form from time to time, for instance when a school threatens to break down. We heard several interesting stories of villagers resorting to spontaneous agitation (e.g. blocking the road or threatening to boycott the elections) to obtain a new school, or effect the transfer of negligent teachers. Beneath this surface of open agitation seems to lie a quiet groundswell of parental involvement in the schooling system.

Interestingly, the 'watchdog' role of parents has not stood in the way of a constructive rapport with the teachers. On the contrary, parent-teacher relations in Himachal Pradesh appear to be more positive than in the other states. The fact that many parents have actively supported the local school (through donations, labour, and other means) fits into that pattern.

It is also worth noting that much of this collective action takes place through informal channels, rather than through formal institutions such as panchayats or parent-teacher associations. As we noted in chapter 5, for instance, a teacher's

## SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF HILL VILLAGES

The social conditions that have facilitated the schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh include relatively cohesive village communities. Hill villages are far from 'egalitarian', but nevertheless the divisions of class, caste and gender that have been so pernicious elsewhere in north India are not so deep in this region. Starting with class, Himachal Pradesh has few landless households, and the lowest proportion of agricultural labourers in the population among all Indian states. This is partly a reflection of post-independence land reforms, aimed at guaranteeing some land to every rural household. Also, common property resources such as forests and pastures play a major role in the rural economy of Himachal Pradesh, further enhancing the comparative equity of access to productive resources.

Similarly, while caste distinctions do exist in Himachal Pradesh, they tend to take a less hierarchical and exploitative form than in many other regions. This feature is linked to the relatively equitable access to productive resources: exploitative caste hierarchies are sustained by the economic dependence of disadvantaged castes on the privileged castes. In a land-abundant economy with a low density of population, disadvantaged groups have their own means of

survival, and this gives them some protection from exploitation. The possibility of migrating to new sites is another form of protection, and there are indeed historical examples of this 'exit' option being used by disadvantaged groups. A related feature of caste relations in Himachal Pradesh is that single-caste villages or hamlets are very common. This, too, contributes to social cohesion at the village level.

Turning to gender relations, again these are far from equal in Himachal Pradesh. Yet patriarchal institutions here leave more scope for female independence. One major consideration is that Himachali women have a high involvement in work outside the home. This contributes to their economic independence, freedom of movement, decision-making power, and social recognition. Women's autonomy has been reinforced by local kinship practices (involving, for instance, enduring links between parents and married daughters), and by high rates of male out-migration. Following on this, gender discrimination is less common in Himachal Pradesh than elsewhere in north India. To illustrate, child mortality in Himachal Pradesh is *lower* for girls than for boys, in contrast with most other states. Himachali women also have a comparatively high involvement in social life and village politics. Active *mahila mandals*, for instance, can be found in many villages.

*Below: Himachali women are highly involved in work outside the home; this contributes to their economic independence and freedom of movement.*

The relatively cohesive nature of village societies in Himachal Pradesh facilitates civic cooperation. An example is the practice of exchange labour, which remains lively in Himachal Pradesh: at harvest time, neighbours often get together to harvest each other's fields in turn. It is easy to see that this practice would be hard to sustain in a highly unequal setting: exchange labour between, say, a landless person and a rich landlord would make no sense. In general, reciprocal cooperation is more likely to flourish in relatively equal societies. The schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh builds, in part, on this potential for civic cooperation.



SANJAL BHATTACHARYA



concern for his or her reputation is one important basis of teacher responsiveness to parental demands. In Himachal Pradesh, the fact that the social distance between teachers and parents (e.g. in terms of educational levels and economic status) is relatively small appears to reinforce this mechanism. Sometimes, formal and informal channels of interaction complement each other. Consider for instance the role of *mahila mandals*, which are quite active in Himachal Pradesh. These women's groups have no formal responsibility for education, but schooling matters do seem to be frequently discussed at mahila-mandal meetings, and this is quite likely to be a matter of concern for a local teacher who cares about his or her reputation.

### ■ State initiative and public response

To some extent, the vitality of civic cooperation in Himachal Pradesh relates to the social structure of the hill region. The absence of sharp social divisions at the village level is likely to facilitate cooperative action. In a highly fragmented society, schooling itself is likely to become a divisive issue: if the local school does not work, the sarpanch may side with the headteacher against the community, parents may be unable to get together to address or even discuss the problem, and privileged families may set up their own private school. The situation where powerful leaders actively obstruct the

spread of education among the masses, not unknown in north India, is an extreme form of such divisions. In Himachal Pradesh, schooling for all seems to be a little bit more of a shared social goal.

Another important part of the story, however, is that in Himachal Pradesh the state has succeeded in creating conditions that foster parental involvement in the schooling system, and a productive rapport between parents and teachers. A sound infrastructure and responsible administration have averted the sense of discouragement and powerlessness so common elsewhere. Parents find that their efforts to educate their children are rewarded, and teachers are given the means to teach properly. These favourable conditions tend to feed on each other in various ways. For instance, decent teaching standards raise parents' expectations of the schooling system, and these expectations, in turn, help to sustain the work culture among teachers.

*'The teacher beats the children,  
she knits and sleeps most of the time.  
If the school had a PTA we could  
have removed her.'*

*A parent in Kapoti (Hamirpur district).*

Similarly, there is a virtuous circle of state initiative and public response. Just as the

state has empowered parents to get involved in the schooling system, parents now play a key role in calling for further improvements. Compared with their counterparts in other north Indian states, Himachali parents are better informed and more demanding of the schooling system (e.g. they have views on teaching methods and the right amount of homework). Parents' demands are felt not only at the village level, but also 'higher up' in the administrative machinery and political system, not least in the State Assembly. One district official related to us how, during the 1998 elections, polling had to be conducted in a single day as parents would not tolerate schools being closed for two days in a row.

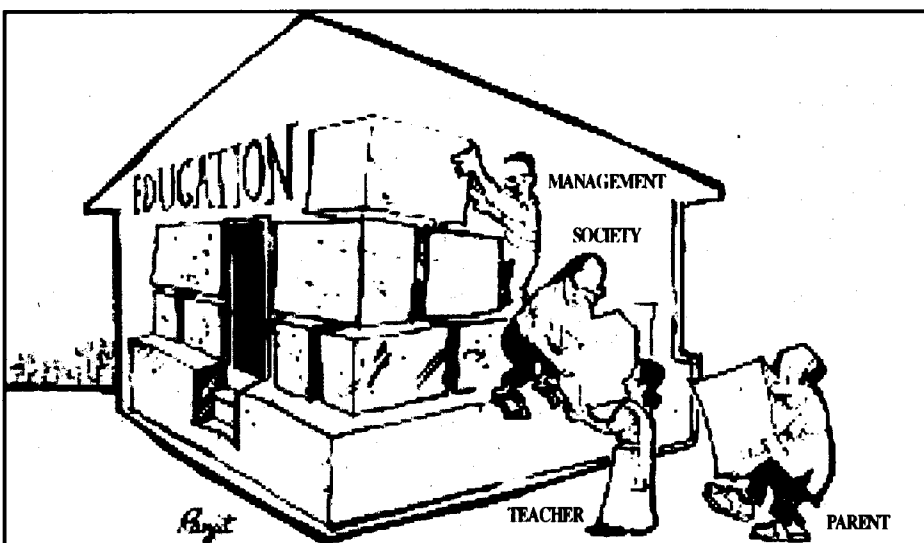
*'Is it true that in my constituency,  
there is a single-teacher  
government school?'*

*(Question asked in the State  
Assembly on 4/4/95.)*

One key link in this virtuous circle is parental education. Early efforts to promote schooling in Himachal Pradesh have ensured that, today, the average father and even mother of primary-school children have at least some education. This makes it much easier for them not only to create a learning environment at home, but also to establish a rapport with the teachers, to monitor the quality of the local school, to take action when standards are falling, to demand better facilities from political leaders, and so on. In this and other ways, the virtuous circle of state initiative and public response is an essential aspect of Himachal Pradesh's journey towards universal elementary education.

## ■ 9.5. Concluding Remarks

The schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh is one of the most enlightening developments of the post-independence period in the field of elementary education.



A great deal remains to be done: education at the upper-primary level is still far from universal (especially for girls), pockets of backwardness persist even at the primary level, and the quality of education is below many parents' expectations. But what has already been achieved is impressive, and provides a solid foundation for further progress. And the virtuous circle of state intervention and public response is likely to be consolidated as education levels among parents continue to increase rapidly in the near future.

**W**e end with a few general remarks on the broader significance of this story. First, it is worth noting that much of what we have said about schooling in Himachal Pradesh also applies to other kinds of local public services. Many H.P. villages, for instance, have lively anganwadis, in contrast with the other north Indian states where anganwadis are mostly non-functional. There are similar contrasts in terms of a whole range of local public services, from health centres to fair-price shops and electricity supply. This observation is consistent with the line of analysis pursued in this chapter, since the social conditions that have facilitated the expansion of schooling are also likely to be favourable to the provision of other types of collective facilities.

**S**econd, Himachal Pradesh's success seems to fit in a broader pattern of rapid expansion of education throughout the Himalayan region (more precisely, the hill region of north and north-east India). Consider, for instance, the list of Indian states with more than 85 per cent school attendance in the 6-14 age group. Except for Kerala and Goa, all these states belong to this region: Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and the Jammu region of 'Jammu and Kashmir' (data for Kashmir are not available). Other parts of the Himalayan region are also doing well. For instance, the hill region of Uttar Pradesh is way ahead of the rest of the state. And even in Arunachal Pradesh (a remote tribal area where 99 per cent of women were illiterate as recently as 1961), school attendance is well above the Indian average, reflecting remarkable progress in recent years. This pattern, again, is consistent with our earlier analysis, given

that many of the enabling features we have identified for Himachal Pradesh (including high government expenditure and a favourable social context) apply to other parts of the Himalayan region as well.

**T**hird, there seems to be an interesting contrast between Himachal Pradesh and Kerala when it comes to the politics of mass education. Both regions have come close to universal elementary education, but through different routes. Himachal Pradesh, we have argued, has benefited from favourable social conditions, particularly in the form of relatively homogeneous village communities and a strong tradition of civic cooperation. Kerala, on the other hand, started off with a highly inegalitarian and oppressive social structure, and it is political action that has made it possible to overcome this initial obstacle against mass education. There are also some interesting similarities in the two approaches, especially the virtuous circle of state initiative and public response.

**F**inally, the social conditions that have facilitated the schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh are obviously difficult to 'replicate' in other contexts. But this does not detract from the possibility of learning from that experience. Aside from pointing to many useful directions of public action, this experience also underlines the link between education, democracy and equity that has been a recurrent theme of this report.

# 10

## CHAPTER TEN

# change is possible



ANAL SHAH

The destiny of India is being shaped in her classrooms.

*(Kothari Commission report, 1966)*

If you are looking for a convenient summary of the report, this is not the right place. The 'Outline' at the end of chapter 1 may help, though we would encourage you to read the whole report. If you are looking for a 'blueprint' of what needs to be done to universalize elementary education, you will not find it here either. It is not that we lack ideas of recommendations to make. Some recommendations follow in a fairly obvious way from the preceding chapters. It is easy to see, for instance, that there is an urgent need for a better schooling infrastructure; for more and better-trained teachers; for closer supervision of the schools; for greater

potential involvement in school management; for a more friendly curriculum; for synchronising school calendars with local patterns of agricultural activity; for a more equitable distribution of infrastructural resources; and so on. On other matters, what needs to be done is less obvious. We have commented, for instance, on the policy dilemmas involved in dealing with school meals, non-formal education, and private schooling, without attempting to resolve these dilemmas. Indeed, there are differences of view on these matters even within our own team, which are best kept to ourselves. The main issue, however,

is not to resolve the finer points of a possible blueprint, but rather to find out why even the more basic things remain undone. That is what this concluding chapter is about.

## 10.1. The Schooling Transition

The PROBE survey paints a bleak picture of the schooling system in rural India. Dilapidated infrastructure, demotivated teachers, paralysing curriculum, irresponsible management — the problems seem endless. From this it is tempting to conclude that government schools are terminally ill, and to look for alternatives.

To avoid this misleading conclusion, we have to put the PROBE survey in historical and comparative perspective. We have to remember, for instance, that for all its flaws it is the government schooling system that has brought elementary education within reach of the masses. For the first time, schooling is no longer the privilege of a small minority, and the goal of universal elementary education is not a distant dream. Wobbly as they are, government schools deserve credit for these new possibilities.

The PROBE survey looks at the most educationally backward states of the country. And within those states, we have often focused on the more deprived areas, which require priority attention. In these areas, what we see is a 'vicious circle of neglect', whereby different flaws of the schooling system feed on each other. School facilities are minimal — classrooms are overcrowded, school buildings are falling apart, teaching aids are a rare sight. Teachers feel trapped in a hopeless work environment, lack respect for the local community, and yearn for better postings. Inspectors don't want to know. Parents, themselves illiterate in many cases, are powerless. Hence, nothing improves. Lacking faith in the system, parents are half-hearted in their efforts to send their children to school. This further demotivates the teachers. Everyone's

hopelessness feeds on everyone else's. The children are the victims.

At the other end of the spectrum, however, are villages where the spread of education has become a self-sustained process. The vicious circle of neglect reflects the *complementary role* of different actors (parents, teachers, pupils, inspectors, the government, and so on). When some fail in their duty, others tend to disown responsibility and to do the same. But the same complementarities can also take a positive rather than a negative form. This can be observed, to various extents, in the more developed villages with better schooling facilities. There, parents often have a modicum of education, and they have high expectations of the schooling system. Also, being better off, they are not as powerless as the parents in more deprived villages: they are able to establish a rapport with the teachers, even to put some pressure on them, if needed, through local leaders or the schooling administration. This helps to keep the teachers on their toes. The teachers, for their part, find their work facilitated by the keen interest of the parents, and face a less demotivating environment than in more deprived villages. Their work, in turn, helps to sustain the hopes and expectations of the parents. The whole process is further consolidated as education spreads in the community.

As this contrast illustrates, the 'schooling transition' (from the vicious circle of neglect to self-sustained progress) builds partly on the spread of education in the parental community. As education levels among parents rise, things get easier on all fronts. This is one reason why the prospects of achieving the schooling transition on a broader basis are likely to improve in the near future.

## 10.2. Improvement or Decline?

The notion of schooling transition seems to suggest that things can only get better, not worse. This, however, is not the case.

The schooling transition indicates the *possibility* of achieving a real breakthrough in the field of elementary education. But realizing this possibility depends crucially on public initiative. As Himachal Pradesh illustrates, the state has a major responsibility both in initiating and in nurturing the schooling transition. Where state commitment is lacking, it is easy for the schooling transition to falter, and even for the vicious circle of neglect to reappear.

This brings us to a question that has not been addressed so far in this report: is the schooling system improving, or declining? It is difficult to answer this question with confidence, since the PROBE survey gives only a 'snapshot' of the schooling system at one point in time. As we noted in chapter 2, the reach of the schooling system has vastly expanded in the last fifty years, and that is certainly one form of improvement. The schooling infrastructure (in terms of number of classrooms, blackboards, etc.), inadequate as it still is, also seems to be improving over time. On the other side, one serious indication of decline is that many parents and teachers complain about the deterioration of teaching standards in government schools. The following extract from an investigator's diary illustrates this widespread feeling:

A PTA (parent-teacher association) meeting took place in the morning, though it was little more than a short ritual... One senior parent gave me a striking account of how the school used to be in the old days, when he attended it himself. The basic message was that the school functioned much better at that time. He described with nostalgia how teachers and children had joined hands to plant the mango trees that were now in front of us, how in those days there was order and discipline at school, how teachers used to visit the homes of children who had been absent for several days, and so on. He also felt that there was a *general* deterioration of schools in the area. Sadly, the teachers agreed with him.

These notes were taken in a remote area of Bihar, where the problem of declining standards may be particularly serious. But even in other states, the issue came up on many occasions. We raised it in a

## THE SCHOOLING TRANSITION IN KHETOLAI

As journalists swarmed into village Khetolai (near Pokhran) to catch the afterglow of the nuclear bomb in May 1998, they were too busy to notice the quiet glory of this oasis of learning. While literacy rates in Jaisalmer district are among the lowest in the country, all the children of Khetolai go to school, and the village even has a thriving secondary school.

Back in the nineteen-fifties, Khetolai was no different from other villages in the area. People were poor and life was hard. No one in Khetolai could read or write, and the nearest primary school was in Pokhran, about 25 kms away.

How did this radical transformation take place? It happened in much the same way as in Himachal Pradesh: a virtuous circle of state initiative and public response.

Around 1955, a gathering of all the sarpanchs of Rajasthan was convened in Kota, under government auspices. When the sarpanchs were asked to list the three most essential needs of their village, the sarpanch of Khetolai answered 'a school, a health centre, and a post office'. His response appealed to the authorities, and all three facilities were immediately sanctioned. This, according to local residents, is how the first village school in the district was created in Khetolai in 1956. An upper-primary school was created in 1962, and upgraded to the secondary level in 1981.

Today, both schools have an excellent infrastructure. For instance, the primary school has eight teachers, seven classrooms, electricity, drinking water, teaching aids, and a library with some 200 books. This may sound extravagant, but every village of this size (around 1500) really ought to

have similar facilities. Khetolai also has a functional NFE centre, an anganwadi, and adult literacy classes.

Parental commitment to schooling grew hand in hand with the expansion of facilities. By the early seventies, 20-5 young men educated in the local school had obtained government jobs, prompting more parents to send their children to school. Others combined their education with skills and enterprise — Bishnois (the majority community here) do not shun hard work even if well-educated. The village experienced a remarkable economic take-off in the seventies, which built to a large extent, according to local residents, on the spread of education (other factors cited by them include government jobs, proximity to the highway, and the creation of a dairy cooperative). Today, Khetolai is a prosperous village.

Over time, education came to be considered as a natural part of every child's upbringing, girls included. In 1984, the enrolment rate at the primary level was around 90 per cent. Lok Jumbish then came to Jaisalmer district, and helped Khetolai to complete its journey towards universal elementary education. According to Lok Jumbish data (confirmed by the local headmaster), school participation rates in the 5-14 age group are now as high as 96 per cent for boys and 84 per cent for girls. At the primary level, school participation is virtually universal, even for girls.

The school teachers spoke glowingly of the support they received from the parents. Five of the primary school's seven classrooms were built with contributions from the parents, who also arranged for the fans and electric fittings. More than these monetary contributions, however, the teachers appreciated the moral support of the parents.

*Mass drill at Khetolai's primary school. In the nineteen-fifties, no one at Khetolai could read or write.*



Though Khetolai looks much like other desert villages, it has a different atmosphere. Aside from enjoying some economic security, people take an interest in local politics and the wider world, and are aware of their rights. Women can be seen reading the newspaper after the morning's work. Most children are vaccinated (the health centre created in 1956 is still operational). And the schooling transition continues, with the secondary school attracting more and more children. In 1997, it was adjudged the best government school in Jaisalmer district, and the ninth best in Rajasthan.

*Based on discussions with local residents, especially Shri Sohan Ram, headmaster of the secondary school.*

DPEP training programme in Udaipur, where education administrators from different states were asked the following question: 'In your view, have standards of teaching in government schools improved or declined during the last 25 years?' The four participants from Himachal Pradesh unanimously responded 'improved'; among the other 12 participants, all but two answered 'declined'.

The decline of teaching standards, if real, has to be taken very seriously. Privileged families can deal with it by sending their children to private schools, but for other families, it is a dramatic loss of educational opportunities.

*'In our time the school teacher was part of the village. He lived with us, and he was our ears and eyes to the outside world. I studied in his school — which was just a small ramshackle room. He taught me enough to enable me to get into the army. But today my grandchildren effectively have no school to go to. Our village school barely functions.'*

(An elderly villager in U.P., quoted in Ramchandran (1998), p.83.)

*Out-of-school in the twenty-first century: young drop-outs from a PROBE village.*



ANAL SHAH

## 10.3. Two Scenarios

Turning from the past to the future, what is going to happen to the schooling system in the next — say — ten years or so? The answer is that it is entirely a matter of public policy. At the risk of simplifying, two scenarios can be envisaged.

First, the decaying tendencies could spread, and undermine the entire government schooling system. As parents lose faith in government schools, those who can afford it will withdraw their children from these schools and put them into private schools. This, in turn, will reduce public pressure to improve government schools. Over time, a two-track schooling system will develop, whereby dysfunctional government schools coexist with the flourishing business of private education for the privileged. This trend is already quite strong in some areas. According to one study, for instance, in urban Lucknow 85 per cent of children are in private schools, and municipal schools are in shambles. In such a situation, the schooling system is likely to consolidate social inequalities, instead of empowering the disadvantaged. This scenario also implies that endemic illiteracy will persist well into the twenty-first century, even in the younger age groups.

Second, an opportunity could be seized to achieve the schooling transition on a broad basis. This would require bold state initiative, and a great deal of public pressure. Indeed, the practical steps that need to be taken (building classrooms, providing teaching aids, appointing teachers, reforming the curriculum, improving the supervision, and so on) are quite demanding. However, in some respects the schooling transition is likely to become easier in the near future. For instance, rising education levels among parents, and growing educational aspirations, will make it easier to break the vicious circle of neglect. Similarly, financial resources for elementary education could expand a great deal, if sustained economic growth is combined with a reorientation of spending priorities (see section 10.5). In these and other ways, there are unprecedented opportunities for a radical upgrading of the schooling system, and for realizing the constitutional goal of universal elementary education.

These two scenarios might be described as the 'crisis scenario' and the 'take-off scenario', respectively. The choice between the two is a crucial political issue at this time.

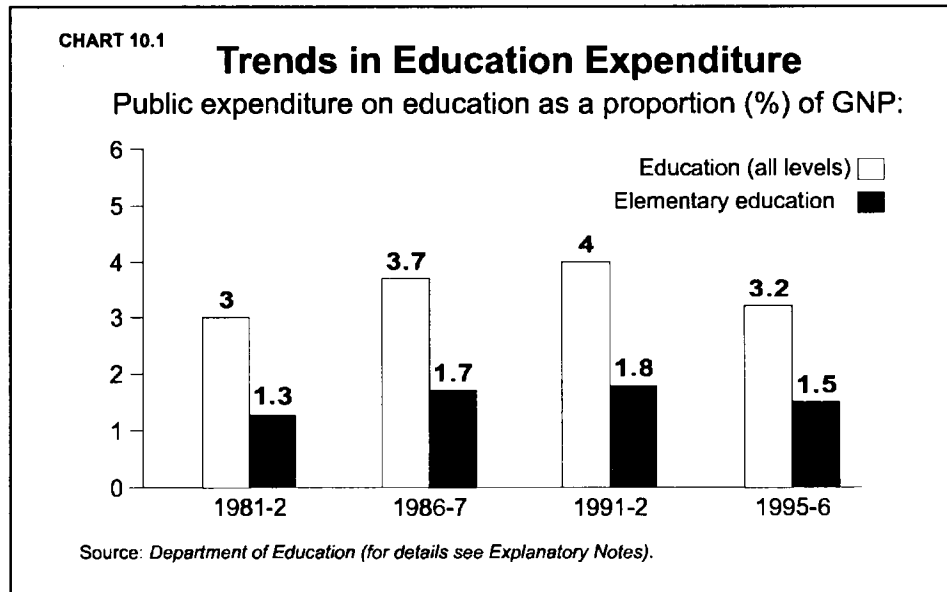
## 10.4. State Inertia

One major obstacle to the take-off scenario is official inertia. At election times, elementary education suddenly emerges in political slogans and party manifestoes. Once elections are over, however, elementary education takes the back seat in parliamentary debates and public policy. The last elections provide a good illustration of this syndrome. While every major political party included 'universal elementary education' in its manifesto, little has been heard about this (either from the government or from the opposition) since the conclusion of the electoral campaign (see Box overleaf).

This inertia is, in part, a continuation of earlier trends. The neglect of elementary education has been a persistent feature of public policy in most states throughout the post-independence period (the colonial record is even worse). In some ways, however, the problem has been

getting more serious in recent years, despite much official rhetoric about the importance of elementary education.

Consider, for instance, the share of public expenditure on education in India's GNP. Official promises to raise this share to 6 per cent go back to the nineteen-sixties, when the Kothari Commission first proposed this benchmark. By now, this goal figures in every major party's election manifesto. And yet, the nineties have seen a *reversal* of the earlier trend of (sluggish) increase in the share of education expenditure in GNP, despite large inflows of foreign funding. This share has come down from 4 per cent in 1991-2 to 3.2 per cent in 1995-6 — more or less the same figure as in the early eighties (Chart 10.1).



### ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN PARTY MANIFESTOES

Despite their rosy promises, election manifestoes often betray a lack of serious concern for elementary education on the part of political parties. Some examples from recent election campaigns:

- The National Front's 1991 manifesto includes a 50-point section reviewing the party's 'performance' while in power (in 1989-91). Elementary education is not mentioned at all, except for the submission of the Ramamurthy report, which later fell into oblivion. Even the section on 'Future Tasks' has little to say on elementary education, which appears way down the list of priorities.
- In the 1991 manifesto of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM), elementary education ranks twenty-first in a list of twenty-six policy priorities. The Communist Party of India (CPI), for its part, mentions the goal of 'compulsory primary education', an implicit dilution of Article 45, which seeks to guarantee *eight* years of schooling to all children.
- In its 1996 manifesto, the Congress party boasts of having introduced 'a new mid-day meal programme to increase nutrition and improve school attendance of 11 crore children', and claims that 3.4 crore children are already covered — conveniently forgetting that these children get monthly rations (at best) instead of mid-day meals. The Congress party is also proud of its 'firm commitment' to raise the ratio of public expenditure on education to GNP to 6 per cent, notwithstanding the fact that this ratio *declined* between 1991 and 1996, when the Congress was in office (see chart 10.1).

As the last example illustrates, the main problem is not the nature of electoral promises (these are grand enough in most cases) but the gap between promises and action. As a further illustration, consider the Bharatiya Janata Party, which leads the present government. During the 1998 electoral campaign, party leaders had much to say on education, even trumpeting the slogan '*Shiksha, Swasthya aur Suraksha*'. The future Prime Minister led the pack, and went so far as to describe 'universal primary education' as 'the one crucial issue before the country' in one interview. The BJP manifesto, however, contained some disquieting signs of abdication on this front, for those who can read between the lines. For instance, unlike other parties the BJP does not promise to make elementary education a fundamental right, or to introduce compulsory education. The manifesto's main preoccupation seems to be with curriculum reform, a valuable objective were it not linked with the party's eagerness to 'saffronize' school education.

Even more disquieting signals followed after the BJP-led government was formed. Elementary education vanished from the main focus of political debates as soon as the elections were over. The new government distanced itself from the proposed 83rd constitutional amendment (see p. 133), described as 'neither practical nor feasible' by the Minister for Human Resource Development (*The Times of India*, 3 May 1998). Instead, it quietly pursued its hidden agenda, exposed in October 1998 on the occasion of a conference of State Education Ministers. Elementary education was suddenly back in the news, but for negative reasons. Indeed, the saffronization controversy further overshadowed the crucial issue of making elementary education a fundamental right.

To see the consequences of this neglect, consider the state of teacher resources in government schools. As we saw in chapter 4, most government schools are understaffed. Instead of tackling this problem, many state governments (including those of the PROBE states) have allowed the situation to *worsen* over time (Chart 10.2). In states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the pupil-teacher ratio has risen by nearly 50 per cent between 1980-1 and 1995-6, approaching the 60:1 mark in both cases. In India as a whole, the pupil-teacher ratio has risen steadily since 1950-1, and is now well above the official 40:1 norm

(Chart 10.3). Similar trends apply to child-teacher ratios.

These adverse trends provide a more tangible indication of official priorities than election slogans. When it comes to elementary education, political leaders simply don't seem to mean what they say. Worse, even what they say often betrays a deep lack of commitment to the constitutional goal of universal elementary education. The following statement by former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram (in an interview with Sonali Bose on 20 March 1996) is symptomatic of a growing mood of abdication:

Yes, in water, health care and education we are worse off. But that is because we put all these eggs in the government basket. Because we have such touching faith in the government delivering on health, education, water supply, sanitation, etc. Now I don't think either the central government or the state governments can deliver on these things. This must come from community action.

Another symptom of state inertia and growing abdication is the fate of the proposal to make elementary education a fundamental right (see chapter 1). This proposal was part of the Common Minimum Programme of the United Front government, announced in 1996, and was formally introduced in the Rajya Sabha in July 1997 as the 83rd constitutional amendment bill. By then, the proposal had been unanimously endorsed by a Committee of State Education Ministers after detailed consideration of its practical implications (Government of India, 1997a). Yet, it could not be passed by the United Front government 'due to paucity of time' [sic], while the new government is engaged in 'serious re-thinking' about this proposal, and even fears that it may be 'neither practical nor feasible' (*Times of India*, 3 May 1998). The bill did not even figure on the agenda of the Conference of State Education Ministers in October 1998.

CHART 10.2

### Pupil-Teacher Ratios in the PROBE States

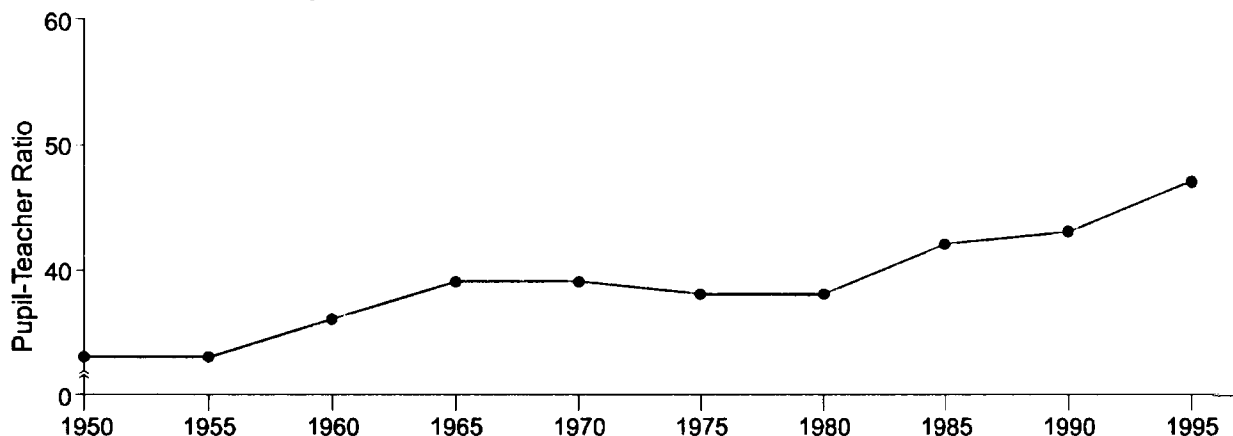
	1980-1	1985-6	1990-1	1995-6	Percentage change (1980-1 to 1995-6)
Bihar	40	49	50	58	+45%
Madhya Pradesh	37	44	44	43*	+16%
Rajasthan	42	45	41	49	+17%
Uttar Pradesh	40	48	56	59	+48%
INDIA	40	43	43	46	+15%

\* *Shiksha karmis* are counted as teachers.

Source: Calculated from Selected Educational Statistics, Department of Education, various years.

CHART 10.3

### Pupil-Teacher Ratio in India: 1950 to 1995



Source: Selected Educational Statistics, Department of Education, various years.



## WHY ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IS NOT A PRIORITY

Why does India have such a dismal record in elementary education?

At one level it is connected with the development path India has followed since the Second Plan. Rapid industrialization focusing on heavy capital goods, high technology, a scientific establishment, nuclear power, etc., was seen as the core of self-reliance, national prestige and economic growth. Investment and energy were directed to this end. Agriculture, agro-industries and simple manufacturing such as textiles (which had up to then been India's strongest items of trade) were neglected. The majority of India's people were seen mainly as suppliers of cheap labour, and as objects of poverty alleviation programmes — not as sources of energy, enterprise and capacities that were the country's real strength. Slogans of 'socialism' meant mainly state control of industry, not popular control; they assumed an economy managed by the elite controlling the bureaucracy. The switch to a market economy decades later has not changed this heavy-industry and high-technology bias.

What did this mean for education? It meant not only a neglect of education as such, but that the funds for education were disproportionately directed at creating institutions of higher learning. It also meant over-centralized top-down structures with uniform syllabi and exams, and little community participation. As unions grew in strength, it also meant a disproportionate amount of funding going into teachers' salaries. The final result is the burgeoning crisis we see in all sectors of education today: widespread illiteracy, neglect of elementary education, failure rates of over 50 per cent in secondary-education tests, and an outdated university system.

But the choice of this top-down development model was related in turn to deep factors of the Indian social structure, primarily the old values of caste hierarchy.

In all pre-capitalist societies there is some stratification by birth. Yet the contrast between traditional China and India is striking: in China entry into the bureaucratic gentry was always open to those who had the wealth to finance studies for their sons. In India, by contrast, humans were seen as divided into *jatis*, almost like different species with inborn characteristics fitting them to particular occupations. Knowledge and ritual practices were the preserve of a *brahman* elite and a few other high castes. The duty of *kshatriyas* was to fight, that of *vaishyas* to be merchants. These needed to learn the skills appropriate for their roles. But the majority of the population, the *shudras*, were considered fit only to be servants. Not only were they

forbidden to even hear the most sacred repository of ritual knowledge, the Vedas, other aspects of education were also considered irrelevant to them. They were to learn the techniques of their crafts, that is all. The traditional Marathi saying, 'Knowledge in the house of the brahmins, grain in the house of the peasants, songs in the house of the dalits', conveyed this caste hierarchy.

With the coming of British rule, schools were started that were in theory open to all, but funding continued to be minimal and it was the brahmins and a few other high castes (e.g. kayasthas) who monopolized the new education system and the institutions created by the new educated middle-classes. They also came to dominate the nationalist movement. Social reformers did little to challenge the conscious or unconscious belief that knowledge was ultimately the preserve and responsibility of a privileged few. Even the Gandhian 'basic education' fit into this, as it assumed a dualism which left higher education and science for the elite.

The anti-caste movement had fought, in various parts of the country, for universal primary education. It was a constant theme of Jotiba Phule, founder of the Satyashodhak movement, who with the help of his wife Savitribai started some of the first schools for girls and untouchable children in Pune around 1850. Members of the Satyashodhak Samaj had to vow to educate both sons and daughters. Phule's testimony to the Hunter Commission in 1882 made perhaps the earliest call for compulsory primary education. Later, leaders of the anti-caste movement emphasized both schooling and reservation in employment as a means of breaking what they saw as the brahman monopoly of elite professions.

Ultimately, however, this 'non-brahman' approach was sidelined in the nationalist movement. The Congress remained dominated by the brahmanic elite, and even the left movement ignored education, convinced that land, rather than knowledge, was the crucial 'means of production' which the rural poor needed.

One of Phule's most famous sayings was '*Vidya vina mati geli, mati vina gati geli, gati vina vitta geli, vitta vina shudra kacle* (for want of education wisdom was lost, for want of wisdom development was lost, for want of development wealth was lost, for want of wealth the shudras have been ruined)'. It could well be the theme of post-independence development — except it would have to be added that the country is also getting ruined.

Gail Omvedt.

## 10.5. Resource Crunch?

Official inertia goes hand in hand with a strong reluctance to spend more resources on elementary education. Lack of funds, in fact, is cited as the main reason for the new government having cold feet about the proposed constitutional amendment. Even among those who are otherwise genuinely committed to universal elementary education, there is a widespread belief that this goal may simply be unaffordable for the time being.

Lack of funds, however, is more a matter of *spending priorities* than of an overall shortage of resources. To illustrate, two independent committees appointed by the Department of Education estimate that implementing the fundamental right to education would require an additional annual expenditure of around 0.5 per cent of India's GNP over the next five years (Government of India, 1997a, 1998). Over the same period, the government proposes to spend about *six times as much* on salary increases in the public sector (Government of India, 1998, p.109). If current spending patterns continue, it will also spend more than *twenty times as much* on 'non-merit subsidies', i.e., subsidies that serve no clear social goals (Government of India, 1997b, p.3). And of course, the extra requirement of 0.5 per cent of GNP is only a small fraction of the gap between current levels of public expenditure on education and the official goal of 6 per cent of GNP. The claim that universal elementary education is unaffordable is really a fig leaf for massively distorted priorities.

***'I sincerely believe that money can be found if representatives of the public, that is, Members of Parliament and Members of State Legislature give sufficient importance to this quest for universalizing access to our education.'***

*(Dr Manmohan Singh, former Finance Minister, in a speech on 'Availability of Finances for Achieving Universal Elementary Education', New Delhi, 24 April 1998.)*

The distortion of financial and political priorities, in turn, relates to deep asymmetries of power in the society. If their demands for higher salaries are not met, public-sector employees can easily go on strike and force the government to loosen its purse-strings. Similarly, powerful lobbies channel endless public subsidies to the middle classes, large farmers, affluent industrialists, the armed forces, and other vocal sections of the society. By contrast, children have little power to influence Finance Ministers and other decision-makers. Nor are their interests adequately represented by third parties.

When presenting the last budget, the Finance Minister proudly reported that '1,500 odd pre-budget memoranda were submitted by various industries and apex chambers like FICCI, CII and ASSOCHAM' (*The Times of India*, 4 June 1998), perhaps one reason for the 'euphoric reaction of captains of industry' to the 1998-9 budget reported in the same article. One wonders how many 'memoranda' he received from children asking for extra teachers, more blackboards, new school mats, or mid-day meals.

Seen in this light, the difficulty in mobilizing resources for education is really an argument *for* rather than against making elementary education a fundamental right. This would greatly enhance the bargaining power of those who are demanding better education facilities (for instance, by enabling them to go to court if a village has no school). If education is recognized as a fundamental right, the government will *have* to revise its spending priorities.

The argument is all the stronger if we remember that *state* governments (as opposed to the central government) account for about 90 per cent of recurrent expenditure on elementary education. In recent years, central-government expenditure on elementary education has significantly increased (with the help of a large dose of foreign funds), but few state governments have followed this example. Making education a fundamental right would constrain all the state governments at once to give higher priority to education, and greatly facilitate the task of building

state-specific lobbies for elementary education.

If you are not convinced of the case for spending more on elementary education, please go back to chapter 1. Remember also that public spending on elementary education is a highly productive investment. This is all the more so if resources are effectively utilized — that, indeed, may well be where there is greatest scope for change.

## 10.6. Soft Options

Education planners in different states are in a quandary. On the one hand, universal elementary education is a constitutional directive. On the other, financial and political resources to realize this goal are sorely lacking. In these circumstances, state governments are increasingly tempted to resort to 'soft options' of various kinds. Useful as these options may be, *over-reliance* on them is a form of abdication. Some examples follow.

**'Non-formal' education** : As the latest annual report of the Department of Education reminds us (p.35), the National Policy on Education of 1986 'had admitted that schools would not reach all children particularly millions of girls and working children', and therefore 'called for a large and systematic programme of Non-Formal Education as an integral component of the strategy to achieve UEE'. In other words, non-formal education centres are officially accepted as an adequate substitute for ordinary schools. This is convenient for the state governments, since NFE centres are far cheaper than ordinary schools. However, as we saw in chapter 8, a large majority of government NFE centres in the PROBE states are non-functional.

**Private schooling** : In the current climate of faith in private enterprise, it is not uncommon to hear that the universalization of elementary education should be entrusted to private schools (P. Chidambaram's statement, quoted earlier, seems to be an implicit reference to this 'option'). This suggestion overlooks the basic point that the communities in greatest need of better schooling facilities

## 'TEER LAG JAYEGA'

Sorwa block in Jhabua district, Madhya Pradesh is overwhelmingly tribal, desperately poor and has abysmal literacy rates. Recently, however, the administration launched a *Sampoorna Saksharta Abhiyan* (Total Literacy Campaign). The strategy is almost military: First, cultural paratroopers, the *kala jatha* (arts contingent) cross enemy lines and shatter villagers' resistance with songs. Then the armoured corps alias the *vikas core group* — the *gram sevak*, malaria doctor and the odd schoolmaster, shell the villagers with messages about development. After firing everybody up with enthusiasm, the campaign moves on to another village, launching yet another lot of adivasis on a rollercoaster development ride into the millennium.

I observed the thrills and spills of sampoorna saksharta with Kalu Singh Azad, an activist with a local trade union working against tribal exploitation, who was temporarily employed in a *kala jatha*. Early one morning in late May, we set out in a jeep for village Piparia, the day's target. It is eleven by the time the jeep picks everybody up. As we reach Chandpur, a tiny market town en route, the core group members (all non-adivasis) order the driver to halt: '*vaar, zara gutkha lena hai*'. Making a beeline for the roadside *paan-bidi* shop, they order chewing tobacco, paan and cigarettes, genially greeting acquaintances. The gutkha stop lengthens into an hour.

From Chandpur to Piparia is a mere half-hour drive. But the prospect scares the core group. 'I don't know if we should be going. *Teer lag jayega* (might be hit by an arrow),' murmurs the master. All of us know that the chances of being hit by arrows at noon are minuscule, so no one bothers to reply. The jeep soon stops outside the sarpanch's house at Piparia. The core group troops into the verandah and, seeing such an impressive array of shirt-pant-clad men, the women of the house swiftly bring out charpoys and spread quilts on them. The *kala jatha* and I sit on one, the malaria doctor and the master collapse on the second and the *gram sevak* reclines on the third in solitary splendour. The half-hour jeep-ride seems to have exhausted the core group; they are fully recumbent, demanding water in faint voices.

Another half hour elapses in recuperation. During this interval, we discover that the sarpanch is away and no one was informed of our visit. So the sarpanch's son is sent off to drum up an audience. The sarpanch's wife, trained by long usage, serves us a lunch of *roti* and *dal*. The *gram sevak* complains loudly as he eats, 'Who knows how this was

made? These adivasis don't bother with cleanliness, do they? *Pannia* would have been better...'. *Pannia* refers to *roti* cooked between the leaves of the flame-of-the-forest, avoiding all contact with the polluting touch of adivasi utensils.

Feeling ashamed of my companions, I go in to thank the hostess. When I come out, the core group is sunk in a post-lunch snooze. They revive as the afternoon shadows lengthen and announce that they are off to do *jan sampark* (public contact). That is the last we see of them for quite some time; they finally lurch in towards the end of the programme, conspicuously drunk. The *jan sampark* was successful.

Meanwhile, the show. Under a spreading *mahua* tree, the *kala jatha* spreads a durrie and sets up a microphone, the screech of its adjustment attracting the usual complement of village urchins. The sarpanch's son's efforts have garnered a young, mainly female audience. The adults of Piparia are absent. But the *kala jatha* plunges on gamely. Accompanied by a harmonium, they launch into the campaign song. The chorus goes:

*Banayenge, banayenge, banayenge*  
*Apne zile ko shreshthatam banayenge*  
(will make, will make, will make,  
will make our district the best).

The word 'shreshthatam' has the *jatha* boys seriously entangled. But what does it matter; no one knows what it means anyway. This inspirational song has eight verses on subjects such as watershed development, soil conservation, women's micro-credit groups and safe drinking water.

The next event is supposed to be a session where villagers voice their problems which are noted by the *vikas* core group and subsequently redressed. But the core group is in a hurry to get back, mouthing the old refrain, '*teer lag jayega*'. As we leave, I ask an idle question and the answer stops me in my tracks. We have just watched people being motivated to go to school. But Piparia does not *have* a school! So after being charged up to become literate, the children go right back to the fields and hearths, minding their younger siblings, taking the goats to graze and remaining illiterate. So what was all that song and dance for?

*Amita Baviskar.*

are least able to attract private schools. If private schools could be relied on to universalize elementary education, they would have done it already.

*Non-government organizations:* Another form of abdication is to expect non-government organizations to supply the missing school facilities. As we saw in chapter 8, there are many inspiring examples of NGO involvement in elementary education. There is also much scope for partnership between NGOs and the state in this field. To expect NGOs to substitute for the government, however, is wishful thinking. Their resources are far too small relative to the needs. Nor is it realistic to expect that large public resources could be spent through this channel without disrupting its integrity.

*Ad hoc campaigns:* Politicians are often tempted to address specific problems through short-term 'campaigns' (which tend to be more politically rewarding than long-term investments). The Total Literacy Campaign fits into this pattern, and so does the more recent 'Each one teach five' initiative. Some of these campaigns have been very successful in the short-term, but their momentum tends to be hard to sustain. The Total Literacy Campaign, for instance, did quite well in the early years, but seems to be running out of steam (see Box, p. 136). Useful as they are, short-term campaigns are no substitute for a lasting improvement in the schooling system.

*Compulsory education:* Compulsory education is *one of the means* that can help to make the right to education a reality. The fact that a large majority of parents support compulsory education for all (see chapter 3) confirms the usefulness of this measure. However, compulsory education should not be used as a means of shifting the responsibility for universalizing elementary education from the state to the parents (if children are out of school, parents are assumed to fail in their duty). The fundamental right to education cannot be *reduced* to compulsory education.

Finally, special mention must be made of the temptation of extending elementary education through low-cost, second-track schooling facilities for deprived areas and communities (NFE centres are only one

example of such facilities). This 'model' has become quite influential in recent years, to the extent that some states have stopped appointing regular teachers and concentrate their efforts on posting shiksha karmis and other para-teachers in areas where school facilities are inadequate. We discussed the pros and cons of this approach in chapter 8, and there is no need to cover that ground again, except to reiterate the real dangers of *double standards*. A minimal acceptability criterion for second-track facilities is that they should meet the same quality norms as other schools. Even when they do, there is an additional issue of *sustainability*. As we argued earlier, in most circumstances these facilities are best seen as temporary supplements rather than permanent substitutes for the formal schools.

What all these soft options have in common is a reluctance to face the basic task of revitalizing the school system. The latter, however, is an essential prerequisite of the fundamental right to elementary education.

## 10.7. A Political Blind Spot

Why does the government show so little concern for elementary education? One answer is that many political leaders are (consciously or sub-consciously) *opposed* to the universalization of education. In some ways, universal education is indeed a threat to privilege and power. As Leo Tolstoy once said, 'Education is a matter of enlightenment and no monarch in his senses would like to do that.' The context of this statement, however, is quite different from contemporary India. While India, like Russia, does have a history of elite obstruction to the spread of education among the masses, the politics of education today are more subtle.

Another answer is that, even if they are not opposed to the universalization of elementary education, political leaders have little to gain from it. In other words, there is little political capital to make from getting children to school. Whether this is

in fact true is an unresolved question. Indeed, since no major political party in India has *attempted* to win public support by taking radical steps to universalize education, it is hard to tell whether this strategy would be successful. Going down that road would require vision and courage, considering that the political gains are uncertain (though possibly quite large), while the costs are more transparent. For instance, a reorientation of spending priorities is likely to come up against powerful interest groups. Similarly, reversing the decline of teaching standards is a major political challenge. As one MLA from Rajasthan put it, 'No political party wants to antagonize the teachers.' The presumption that teachers need to be antagonized for progress to be made is questionable; but improved accountability mechanisms are certainly required, and persuading the teaching profession to come to terms with this would take much skill and courage (see Box, p. 138).

These obstacles are unlikely to be overcome in the absence of a strong political 'lobby' for universal elementary education. The history of educational advancement around the world confirms the importance of political lobbies in this context. In some countries (such as Japan, Turkey and Indonesia) the promotion of education was part of a nationalist or anti-colonial project. In others (e.g. China, Nicaragua, Vietnam, and parts of Latin America), education was a major concern of communist parties and revolutionary movements. In parts of south and western India, a strong lobby for universal education emerged in the context of social movements for the emancipation of disadvantaged castes. Access to education, for instance, was a paramount concern of Izhava leaders in nineteenth-century Kerala (see p.13), and also of the anti-caste movement in Maharashtra.

In some countries, the education lobby has been led by the government, for motives ranging from ideological commitment to concern for social integration. There is, however, little sign of this happening in India. This basic fact highlights the role of political opposition and social movements in pressing for the

## POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS IN UTTAR PRADESH

Teachers enjoy substantial political influence in Uttar Pradesh. Indeed their representation in government is ensured by the constitution, which provides that one-twelfth of all MLCs (Members of Legislative Council) are to be teachers elected from teacher constituencies. Unlike other government-paid employees, teachers are also allowed to contest MLA elections. In 1993, 8 per cent of all MLCs and 11 per cent of all MLAs in Uttar Pradesh were teachers. And as S.P. Singh (1986) notes: 'A teacher continues to remain a teacher in his post even after having won the elections. Because of this facility, teachers in large number have entered into politics... Politically active teachers draw full salaries from their schools and colleges and they do not have time to take their classes.'

The political influence of teachers in Uttar Pradesh comes not only from their representation in the state legislature, but also from the strength of their unions. When teachers strike, the government tends to concede their demands, to avoid the public resentment caused by prolonged disruptions of the schooling system. Teachers' unions have used this power on many occasions. Between 1965 and 1988, there were 10 major agitations by the secondary teachers' union, with an average duration of 24 days.

The evolution of education policy in Uttar Pradesh has been heavily influenced by teachers' demands. For instance, the major education Acts in the past 30 years have come about shortly after periods of intense lobbying by teachers' unions. This happened with the Salary Distribution Act of 1971, whereby the government undertook to pay the full salaries of all teachers in government-aided schools. Similarly, active campaigns by teachers' unions led to the Basic Education Act, whereby the state government assumed direct control of schools formerly administered by local bodies and undertook to pay teachers' salaries in these schools. These two Acts paved the way for centralized educational management, much to the interest of teachers since centralized management reduces accountability to the school principal or local manager.

The campaigns of teachers' unions have focused overwhelmingly on the issue of salaries and work conditions. In this respect they have been quite successful, as is evident for instance from the rapid growth of teachers' salaries (about 9 per cent per year in real terms during the 1980s according to one estimate). Unfortunately, teachers have seldom used their political power to campaign for broader improvements in the schooling system, or for the promotion of education in general. To some extent this is understandable, since the perceived role of teachers' unions is to further the immediate interests of their own members rather than those of pupils or parents. The latter, unlike teachers themselves, tend to be dispersed and unorganized, and this asymmetry of power has led to major biases in education policy. The report of the National Commission on Teachers (1986), an enlightening document written with much sympathy for the teaching profession, does not shy away from mentioning this problem (p.71): 'We must invite attention to the need to promote actively parents' organizations all over the country... we feel that such organizations are desperately needed to promote and safeguard the educational interests of their wards and to counteract the negative and unhealthy political preoccupations of some of the teachers and their organizations.' This assessment remains valid today.

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fundamental right to education. The government, of course, retains the primary responsibility for providing education. But the society at large also has a responsibility to galvanize the government into action.

In this respect, a great deal remains to be done. Somehow, elementary education does not figure very high on the agenda of popular movements, particularly in north India. In international perspective, this is a curious blind spot. For instance, communist parties around the world have a strong record of concern for education, not only when they are in power (as in China, Cuba and Vietnam), but also when they struggle for social change outside the government (as in Latin America). In India, however, communist organizations have shown little interest in education. The dismal state of elementary education in West Bengal after twenty years of Left Front rule is one symptom of this problem. Perhaps Communist leaders there consider that education is a matter of 'welfare', not of radical politics. Lenin would have differed:

I can say that so long as there is such a thing as illiteracy in our country, it is too much to talk about political education... An illiterate person stands outside politics, he must first learn his ABC. Without that, there can be no politics, without that there are only rumours, gossip, fairy-tales and prejudices, but not politics.

*Lenin, 17 October 1921*

The blind spot is not confined to communist parties. To illustrate, consider the People's Manifesto submitted during the election campaign of 1991 by a coalition of grass-roots organizations. This manifesto, which strives to 'reflect the concerns of the victims of development and the peripherals of democracy', does not have a single line on education. Judging from the PROBE survey, this People's Manifesto has overlooked a major concern of the people. An analogous document produced in 1998 is also silent on education. Similarly, it is intriguing that access to education has not been a major concern of dalit political organizations in north India (e.g. the Bahujan Samaj Party), in contrast

## ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN THE MEDIA

One indication of the absence of a strong lobby for elementary education in India is the poor coverage of this subject in the media.

English-medium newspapers give a particularly useful indication of the issues that capture the attention of those who are in positions of power and influence. As the attached charts illustrate, elementary education gets far less attention in these newspapers than, say, 'food processing', not to speak of foreign investment.

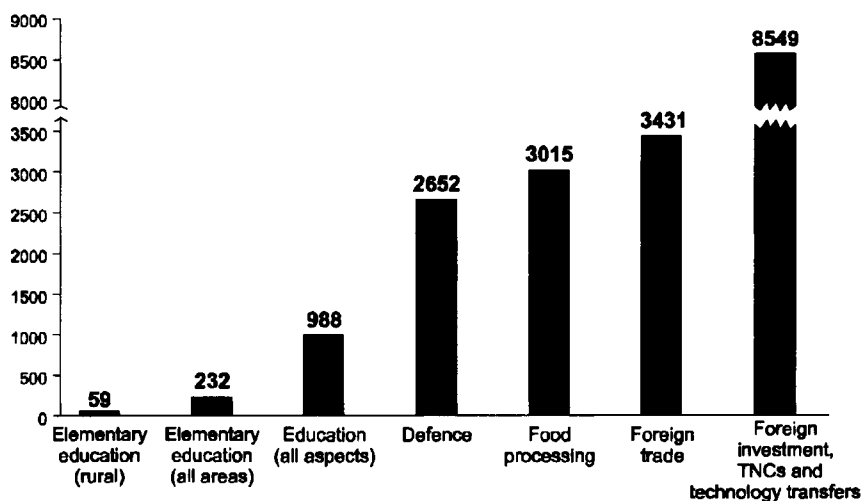
The division of attention within the 'education' rubric is also interesting. Less than one-fourth of all education-related articles focus specifically on elementary education, and only a tiny proportion focus on elementary education in rural areas. Most of these education-related articles are concerned with higher education, or with aspects of secondary education in urban areas. It is not unusual for a small incident in a privileged school in Delhi to become national news, while the daily struggle of underprivileged children in rural areas goes unnoticed. Even *The Times of India's* periodical 'Education Supplement' pays remarkably little attention to elementary education.

Similarly, defence is discussed about *ten times* as frequently as elementary education. After the nuclear tests in May 1998, elementary education-related issues virtually disappeared from the media, while defence was the subject of hundreds of articles each month. The accepted perception of 'national security' does not seem to encompass the economic security and well-being of its citizens.

CHART 10.4

### Focus on Elementary Education vis-à-vis Other Issues

Total number of articles published in a sample of 17 daily newspapers in 1997-8



For education and defence, the reference period is June 1997 to June 1998; for other subjects, it is January-December 1997. Source: Calculated from files of newspaper clippings at the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, New Delhi. For a list of the newspapers, see Explanatory Notes.

CHART 10.5

### Focus on Elementary Education vis-à-vis Defence

Month-wise number of articles published in a sample of 17 daily newspapers in 1997-8

Month	Elementary education	Education (all aspects)	Defence
July 1997	16	68	167
August 1997	34	133	124
September 1997	33	116	146
October 1997	23	83	150
November 1997	23	58	85
December 1997	16	85	100
January 1998	12	53	81
February 1998	9	57	78
March 1998	13	52	104
April 1998*	21	124	253
May 1998	12	85	864
June 1998	20	74	500

\* Exam period for secondary schools.

Source: Calculated from files of newspaper clippings at the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, New Delhi. For a list of the newspapers, see Explanatory Notes.

## SCHOOLING AND THE NAXALITE MOVEMENT IN CENTRAL BIHAR

When I visited the school in Chatiana (Jehanabad district, Bihar), only three pupils were there, standing in one corner in a posture that suggested punishment. The teacher was sitting cross-legged on the floor, stick in hand, dozing. The classroom was bare, except for the teacher's cycle. Many children of school-going age were roaming freely in the vicinity.

This is just one example of the pathetic condition of primary schools in central Bihar. Aside from all the 'usual' reasons why schools may stop functioning, the ongoing political strife in this area often disrupts schooling for prolonged periods. In some villages under police surveillance, the school has been converted into a police camp, as no other premises are available for this purpose. In other villages, children from one hamlet dare not attend school in another hamlet, due to local tensions. Children from the lower classes and castes suffer most, as the local school is rarely located in their hamlet. In Belaur village, the school building was used for nearly a year as a refuge by dalit families who had fled their homes after an armed attack by the Ranbeer Sena. In various places, teachers who are politically active have been attacked, kidnapped and even killed by upper-caste gangs or Naxalite factions, and other teachers are so scared that they seldom turn up for work. In these and other ways, the schooling system has collapsed in many villages. A majority of children in this area are out of school.

In villages where government school facilities have collapsed, private schools have proliferated. Many of them are run by local unemployed youth with some education. They charge moderate fees, and are considered to provide education of reasonable quality. These private schools, however, often cater to specific castes. If anything, they contribute to caste polarization in the area rather than to imparting values of social equality to the children.

What struck me is that the schooling situation in central Bihar was not a matter of much concern to the Naxalite movement. In Chatiana itself, all the parents are members of a Naxalite group, yet they showed no interest in schooling matters. Illiterate children are easily found even in families where these children are about to become the third generation of Naxalites. While Naxalite factions have attempted to run alternative schooling facilities in some areas, these efforts have been limited (and often unsuccessful, partly due to police repression and lack of resources). This indifference stands in sharp contrast with the energy and dedication shown by the movement in dealing with issues such as land rights, minimum wages and upper-caste oppression.

It is puzzling that a movement which aims to work for radical social change has not recognized that education plays a crucial role in the emancipation of the masses, helping them to build their individual capabilities and collective strength. The neglect of education by the Naxalite movement in central Bihar contrasts with the emphasis on education by communist movements in many other countries. In this respect, the teachings and personal example of Dr Ambedkar also stand out. His message to the dalits cannot be forgotten: *Shikshan, Sangathan aur Sangharsh* (Education, Mobilization and Struggle).

The Naxalite movement has done a great deal to restore the confidence of the dalits in the area, and to help them to assert their constitutional rights. However, it has paid little attention to the role of education as a tool of liberation. Nor have Naxalite leaders recognized that educated masses could lead a more informed and equal struggle. Instead, education is regarded as reform rather than revolution. This calls for some re-thinking about the meaning of revolution. Is it just about capturing state power, or does it also involve empowering people as persons?

*Bela Bhatia.*

with earlier movements of this kind in south and western India. Perhaps the preoccupation with short-term electoral politics has contributed to this neglect. As for non-government organizations (NGOs), their terms of reference often preclude active involvement in 'political' matters.

**B**eyond these specific examples is a general lesson of some importance: unless the connection between universal education and social justice is more clearly recognized by organizations that claim to represent the underprivileged, the low visibility of elementary education in Indian politics is likely to continue. To some extent, the dominant view that poor people do not 'need' education has influenced even the critics of the establishment. A revision of perspective is long overdue.

## 10.8. Reasserting the Fundamental Right to Education

**W**e began this report (chapter 1) with some upbeat comments about the imminent prospect of elementary education becoming a fundamental right. Ten chapters and several months of work later, the prospects have receded rather than improved. Recent media reports suggest that the current government has no intention of supporting this amendment. So far, none of the opposition parties has attempted to revive the debate.

**P**ublic pressure may well succeed in saving the amendment. Even if the amendment is passed, however, it will only be one more milestone on the long road to universal elementary education. The milestone is very important, if only because the notion of fundamental right has great value in overcoming the objections and excuses that are constantly invoked to continue postponing the goal of universal elementary education ('it can't be done', 'resources are lacking', 'the system is not ready', 'people are not interested', etc.). But legislation *alone* cannot make the fundamental right to education

a reality. With or without the 83rd amendment, attempts to dilute the right to education (mainly through 'soft options' of various kinds) are likely to continue.

**I**t is against this background that we end with an appeal to you, the reader, to promote the fundamental right to education in your own domain of activity and influence. If there is any single message we would like you to remember from this report, it is the overwhelming popular demand for elementary education of decent quality. Nagging doubts about the importance of education for the underprivileged are out of date. The time is for concerted action. The future of hundreds of millions of children is at stake.

Write to us with your views and suggestions at :

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# survey methodology

## 1. Sampling Procedure and Related Matters

### 1.1. Sample villages

The villages covered by the PROBE survey (called 'PROBE villages' in the text) are essentially an *extended sub-sample* of a random sample of villages studied in 1994 by the National Council of Applied Economic Research.<sup>1</sup>

For each of the PROBE states (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh), villages were selected from the NCAER sample through stratified random sampling. The districts were grouped by level of female literacy, and sample districts were chosen at random from each group. Within the selected districts, villages were chosen at random among all NCAER villages in the 300 to 3,000 population range.<sup>2</sup> The size restriction was to ensure that each village is large enough for a primary school to be viable, but not so large as to make the survey exercise unmanageable. Note that, in rural India, about two-thirds of the population live in villages within that population range.

The NCAER sub-sample, selected as above (122 villages in all), was extended as follows. For every other sub-sample village, the investigators also surveyed one 'neighbouring village', i.e. the nearest village within the same 300 to 3,000 population range. This procedure was adopted to increase the sample size at relatively low cost. Taken together, the NCAER sub-sample and neighbouring villages constitute our 'sample villages'.

In each village, the investigators began with a detailed survey of all schools with a *primary* section (the 'sample schools'). In the 188 sample villages, 236 such schools were identified: 195 government schools and 41 private schools. For further details of the composition of the sample schools, see p.7 at the end of chapter 1. Basic details of other education facilities (including non-formal education centres, adult literacy classes, etc.) were also recorded.

### 1.2. Sample households

For each of the 'NCAER sub-sample' villages, a household listing was readily available from the earlier NCAER survey. In each of

these villages, we selected 12 households from that list through circular random sampling. A list of 'replacement households' was also drawn (also through random sampling). Whenever investigators were unable to find a household from the first list, they looked for a household from the second list. Note that no household survey was conducted in the 'neighbouring' villages.

Since the main focus of the household survey was on primary schooling, households without any child in the 6-12 age group were skipped (in such cases, investigators moved to the closest neighbour).

Though the household survey aimed at covering 12 households in each of the 122 'NCAER sub-sample villages', the actual sample size is smaller. This is partly because the investigators were unable to complete the full round of 12 households in some cases (they were instructed to give priority to the school survey), and partly because questionnaires deemed to be of insufficient quality were discarded at the data-verification stage. The data set used in this report has 1,221 households for the PROBE states.

### 1.3. Children sub-samples

In each household, PROBE investigators collected basic information (age, gender, schooling status, etc.) about every household member in the 0-18 age group. In addition, they collected detailed information about (and, whenever possible, conducted direct interviews with) a sub-sample of children, selected as follows. All the children aged 6-12 in the household were initially grouped in three categories: 'currently-enrolled', 'drop-out' and 'never-enrolled'. In each non-empty category, *one* child (the child whose name came first in alphabetical order, within that group) was selected for detailed interview.

In the text, the terms 'random sub-sample of currently-enrolled children in the 6-12 age group' (and correspondingly for 'drop-out' and 'never-enrolled') refer to these three sub-samples of children. The numbers of children in each sub-sample are as follows: currently-enrolled 1,066; drop-out 106; never-enrolled children 226. Note that these numbers are *not* proportional to the total numbers respectively of currently-enrolled, drop-out and never-enrolled children in the sample households. This should be clear from the sampling procedure (see also section 4 below).

## 1.4. Himachal Pradesh

The Himachal Pradesh survey (used in chapter 9) followed exactly the same procedure as in the other states. The only difference is that, in Himachal Pradesh, we deliberately surveyed a larger number of villages (relative to the state population). Taking into account the time constraint and the available number of investigators, we randomly selected 7 out of Himachal Pradesh's 12 districts for investigation (the selected districts were Bilaspur, Chamba, Hamirpur, Kangra, Kullu, Mandi, Simla). In each district, two 'NCAER sub-sample' villages were selected. For each sub-sample village, the investigators also visited up to three 'neighbouring villages', depending on the time available. Altogether, 14 sub-sample villages and 34 neighbouring villages were covered. These 48 sample villages had 48 government schools and 6 private schools.

## 2. Field Work

The PROBE survey took place between September 1996 and December 1996 (sequentially in different states). In each village, the survey began with an unannounced visit to the government primary school, followed by visits to other schools (government or private) with primary sections, as well as to other education facilities, if any. The 'village questionnaire' was then filled with the help of the sarpanch or some other knowledgeable individual, followed by the household survey.

## 3. Survey Questionnaires

Five questionnaires were used in the PROBE survey. Each questionnaire had space for both quantitative and qualitative data, as well for the investigators' personal observations.

*Village questionnaire:* This questionnaire involved the collection of basic data on village characteristics, e.g. accessibility, population size, social composition, availability of various facilities, and so on. The respondent was usually the sarpanch, or the headteacher, or some other knowledgeable local resident.

*Government-school questionnaire:* This questionnaire had two parts. The first part was filled with the help of the headteacher (or, in his or her absence, the senior-most teacher among those present). The main focus, here as elsewhere, was on the primary section (classes 1 to 5). This part of the questionnaire dealt with matters such as infrastructural facilities, enrolment data, management problems, relations with parents, etc. The second part was addressed to the class-1 teacher (in his or her absence, teachers of successively higher classes were sought), and was concerned with his or her background, training, perceptions, work environment, teaching methods, etc.

*Private-school questionnaire:* This questionnaire was much the same as the government-school questionnaire, with some additional questions of specific relevance to private schools.

*Household questionnaire:* This questionnaire had four parts, focusing respectively on (1) the household, (2) one selected 'currently-enrolled' child (see section 1.3 above), (3) one selected 'drop-out' child, and (4) one selected 'never-enrolled' child. The respondent was an adult, preferably the mother or father of children in the 6-12 age group. When both were available, investigators were asked to interview the mother rather than the father, if possible. However, a majority (63 per cent) of the main respondents are in fact male, partly because most of the investigators were male and found it difficult to communicate directly with female respondents in the prevailing social environment. Part 2 was filled only when the household had at least one child in the 'never-enrolled' category, and similarly with parts 3 and 4 for the other categories. In addition to collecting detailed information about each selected child from the main respondent, investigators were asked to make an attempt to interview the child himself or herself. The child interviews, however, were a disappointment as most young children were shy and investigators had a hard time establishing a rapport with them (except in Himachal Pradesh).

*'NFE centre' questionnaire:* This questionnaire was similar to the government-school questionnaire, but shorter. It was filled with the help of the NFE-centre instructor.

The PROBE survey placed much emphasis on qualitative data and personal observations from field investigators. Some investigators gave remarkably perceptive accounts of the functioning of the sample schools as well as of the predicament of the sample households. These field notes are extensively used in this report, in addition to the presentation of quantitative information.

## 4. Some Qualifications

We end with a few qualifications about the representativeness of the sample, and related matters.

1. The sample size in each state is not quite proportional to the state population. This bias can be corrected through appropriate weighting of the observations, but we did not attempt to do so as weighting appeared to make little difference for our purposes.
2. The PROBE survey is slightly biased towards smaller villages, as villages with a population over 3,000 were excluded (villages with a population below 300 were also excluded, but these account for a small share of the total population).
3. As mentioned on p. 103, some private schools are likely to have been missed. Note, however, that the survey does yield an

unbiased estimate of the proportion of children enrolled in private schools, as this estimate is based on household data.

4. The household survey excludes households without any child in the 6-12 age group. In this respect, the sample households are not exactly representative of the population as a whole; however, this does not matter for our purposes.

5. As noted earlier, the numbers of children in the 'currently-enrolled', 'drop-out' and 'never-enrolled' sub-samples are not proportional to the total number of currently-enrolled, drop-out and never-enrolled children in the sample households. However, in the few cases where data from these different sub-samples were aggregated (e.g. to calculate 'average hours of work' — see p. 16), we did correct for this through suitable weighting.

6. The categories 'currently-enrolled', 'drop-out', and 'never-enrolled', which play an important role in our analysis, reflect the schooling status of a child as reported by his or her parents. Because we did not anticipate any ambiguity in this regard, the investigators were not given specific instructions on how to deal with cases of nominal enrolment, i.e. children who are nominally enrolled but rarely attend school if at all (see p. 91). A reasonable presumption is that such children were usually recorded as 'currently-enrolled'. The practice of nominal enrolment is likely to have increased in recent years, e.g. due to food rations and enrolment drives. As a result, current-enrolment figures may give a slightly exaggerated picture of actual school participation (e.g. p. 7). Similarly, the sharp decline in the proportion of 'never-enrolled' children between 1986-7 and 1996 (see p. 19) may reflect, in part, the growing practice of nominal enrolment.<sup>3</sup>

7. We end by mentioning that the PROBE survey did fall into one serious trap that has affected many earlier household surveys in north India: the under-counting of adolescent girls. For instance, the female-male ratio in the 6-14 age group among our 1,221 sample households is only 0.75, compared with 0.87 for the PROBE states according to census data.<sup>4</sup> This implies that about 200 girls in that age group were missed by the survey. Fortunately, this bias affects very few of the results presented in this report. The main issue is how it affects our estimates of the proportions of girls who are 'currently-enrolled', 'drop-out' and 'never-enrolled' (see e.g. p. 7). These estimates have been corrected by assuming that all the 'missing girls' belong to the last two groups, and are distributed between these two groups in the same proportion as the girls of the same age who *were* identified by the survey. The logic is that (1) currently-enrolled girls are unlikely to have been 'missed', and (2) there is no reason to believe that, among non-enrolled girls, 'drop-out' girls were more likely to be missed than 'never-enrolled' girls, or vice-versa.

## Notes

1. The findings of the NCAER survey are reported in National Council of Applied Economic Research (1996a, 1996b). The NCAER's sampling procedure and related details are described in National Council of Applied Economic Research (1996a), chapters 1 and 2.

2. Two to four villages were selected from each district, depending on the target number of districts in the relevant state. The target number of districts, in each case, was roughly proportional to the state population. Note also that, in the original NCAER sample, villages are selected with probability proportional to size (using Lahiri's method); this avoids over-representation of small villages, both in the NCAER sample and in our own sub-sample.

3. Note, however, that a comparison between 1986-7 NSS data and 1994 NCAER data confirms this trend, even though food rations had not yet been introduced in 1994 and enrolment drives were still relatively uncommon.

4. Smoothed age distribution data for 1996 (derived from Census of India 1991, by projection) are available in Government of India (1996).

# explanatory notes

Below are some explanatory notes pertaining to specific charts presented in the text. They are best read together with the 'Survey Methodology' section.

*Chart 2.1 (Educational attainments):* Calculated from International Institute for Population Sciences (1995a), Table 3.8, and International Institute for Population Sciences (1995b), Table 3.6. Similar information is also available from Census of India 1991; there are small discrepancies between the two sources, but the basic patterns are similar.

*Chart 2.5 (Number of illiterates):* Calculated using population estimates and literacy rates (age 5+) from Bose (1991), pp.48-50. The 5+ literacy rate for 1991 was calculated by assuming that the ratio of 7+ to 5+ literacy rates was the same in 1991 and 1981. The proportion of the population in the 5+ age group was obtained from census data for 1951-81, and from Sample Registration System for 1991.

*Chart 2.6 (Literacy rates in China and India):* The backward projection method ignores the fact that survival rates tend to be higher for literates than for non-literates. However, in practice it seems to work reasonably well; for further details, see Drèze and Loh (1995).

*Chart 2.8 (Estimates of child labour):* Based on Census of India 1981 (Series 1, Social and Cultural Tables, Part IV-A, Table C-4, pp. 466-7); National Sample Survey Organisation (1997), Table 4.5, p.14; National Council of Applied Economic Research (1996b), Appendix 3.22, page A-352 (the NCAER figure relates to the 6-14 age group). The definition of 'workforce participation' varies between different surveys. Roughly speaking, it is meant to refer to participation in any economic activity (including household work) for a pre-specified number of days in the year, or with reasonable 'regularity'.

*Chart 2.9 (Work patterns of out-of-school children):* Out-of-school children include both never-enrolled and drop-out children. The data for these two sub-samples were aggregated using the proportions of never-enrolled and drop-out children in the sample households as weights.

*Chart 2.10 (Average cost of sending a child to school):* Figures at current prices have been converted to 1996-7 prices using the

Wholesale Price Index (from *Economic Survey 1996-97*, p. S-67). The PROBE and NCAER estimates, unlike the NSS estimates, include additional clothing expenses due to schooling. The NCAER-based figure excludes Uttar Pradesh.

*Chart 2.11 (School availability):* Based on the Sixth All-India Educational Survey (NCERT, 1997a), Tables V.10, V.13 and V.22.

*Chart 3.2 (Proportion of never-enrolled children):* The NSS figure is from National Sample Survey Organisation (1993), Report No. 365 (42nd round, July 1986-June 1987), part II. The PROBE figure for 1996 has been adjusted for under-reporting of girls (see Survey Methodology, section 4); the unadjusted proportion of never-enrolled children is 16 per cent, instead of 19 per cent.

*Chart 3.5 (How out-of-school children spend a 12-hour day):* See Chart 2.9.

*Chart 3.6 (Schooling is expensive):* Costs of 'clothing' are the estimated additional costs (of clothing) due to school attendance.

*Chart 4.1 (School facilities are improving):* The figures for 1986 are calculated from Fifth All-India Educational Survey data presented in Tyagi (1993). There is some doubt about the reliability of the figure for 'blackboards' in 1986, which we were unable to verify from the original source.

*Chart 4.2 ('If all the children were at school'):* Pupils per teacher are calculated by dividing the child population of the sample villages (age 6-10) by the number of teachers appointed in primary sections. The child population is estimated from the total population of the sample villages by assuming that, in each state, the proportion of the population in the 6-10 age group is the same in the sample villages as in the state as a whole. The state-specific age distributions are taken from Government of India (1996) (the proportion of the population in the 5-9 age group was used as a proxy for the proportion aged 6-10). A similar procedure was used to calculate the number of pupils per pacca classroom.

*Chart 4.5 (Pupil-teacher and child-teacher ratios in the PROBE villages):* (1) Government teachers 'appointed in primary sections' include those working in primary sections of upper-primary or secondary schools. (2) The child population in the 6-10 age group is calculated as in Chart 4.2. (3) The pupil-teacher ratios are likely

to be a little on the high side, due to the fact that enrolment data are exaggerated in many schools (see chapter 7). (4) Following on the discussion in the text, two further differences between pupil-teacher and child-teacher ratios should be noted. First, the child-teacher ratio includes children currently enrolled in *private* schools in the numerator. The argument for doing so is that, in rural areas, children enrolled in *private* schools are really 'discouraged' pupils of government schools (see chapter 8), who should not be ignored in judging the adequacy of the latter. The reader who finds this argument unconvincing can easily adjust the figures for himself or herself (noting that private-school children represent about 18 per cent of all enrolled children in the PROBE villages). Second, even with universal enrolment in government schools, the 6-10 age group would not exactly coincide with the child population enrolled at the primary stage, due to early enrolment and repetition. In practice, this is a minor qualification, because repetition is uncommon at the primary stage and early enrolment is compensated by early exit.

*Chart 4.6 (Teacher activities at school):* Based on all government schools with a primary section.

*Chart 5.1 (Social background of teachers and students):* Data on the social composition of children enrolled in government schools are derived from the sub-sample of currently-enrolled children.

*Chart 7.1 (Unfinished agenda of Operation Blackboard):* Based on government primary schools (the target group for the first phase of Operation Blackboard).

*Chart 7.2 (Coverage of incentive schemes):* The left-hand side panel is based on government schools with primary sections.

*Chart 7.3 (Frequency of inspection):* Based on government schools with primary sections.

*Chart 7.4 (The inspection process):* See chart 7.3.

*Chart 7.5 (Regional contrasts):* Based on all government schools with primary sections. This table should be taken as indicative, as the state-specific samples are relatively small.

*Chart 8.1 (Dry ration scheme):* Based on government schools with primary sections.

*Chart 8.2 (Government vs. private schools, part 1):* Based on the sub-sample of currently-enrolled children.

*Chart 8.3 (Government vs. private schools, part 2):* Based on all schools with primary sections (hence some figures in this table differ slightly from similar figures elsewhere, based on primary schools only).

*Chart 8.4 (Comparative costs of schooling):* Based on the sub-sample of currently-enrolled children.

*Chart 9.1 (Declining illiteracy in Himachal Pradesh):* Calculated from census data (Social and Cultural Tables, various years). The literacy rates for Himachal Pradesh in 1951 and 1961 were reconstructed from district-level data. The 1961 figure is not entirely reliable.

*Chart 9.2 (Educational achievements in Himachal Pradesh):* Literacy rates are from Census of India 1991 (unpublished figures). Figures on completion of classes 5 and 8 are calculated from NFHS data presented in International Institute for Population Sciences (1995b), Table 3.6. The PROBE figures for schooling status of girls in 1996 are adjusted for under-counting of female children (see Survey Methodology, section 4).

*Chart 10.1 (Trends in education expenditure):* Calculated from Government of India (1995), Statements II and VI. The figures for 1995-6 are calculated (in the same way) from *Selected Educational Statistics* (Department of Education, 1997) and *Economic Survey 1996-97* (Ministry of Finance, 1997). 'Education expenditure' refers to total expenditure on education (by Education Department and other Departments) on revenue account, plan and non-plan.

*Chart 10.2 (Pupil-teacher ratios in the PROBE states):* These ratios refer to government primary schools.

*Chart 10.3 (Pupil-teacher ratio in India):* See Chart 10.2.

*Chart 10.4 (Focus on elementary education vis-à-vis other issues):* The sample dailies are: *Indian Express* (New Delhi), *Hindu* (Gurgaon), *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), *Independent* (Bombay), *Observer of Business and Politics*, *Patriot* (New Delhi), *Pioneer* (New Delhi), *Statesman* (New Delhi), *Sunday Observer* (New Delhi), *Telegraph* (Calcutta), *Times of India* (New Delhi), *Tribune* (Chandigarh), *Business Standard* (Calcutta), *Business Line* (Gurgaon), *Dataline Business* (Calcutta), *Economic Times* (Delhi), *Financial Express* (New Delhi).

*Chart 10.5 (Focus on elementary education vis-à-vis defence):* See Chart 10.4.

# SOURCES

## Chapter 1

p. 2: Population of PROBE states: Bose (1991), p. 57.

p. 4: Infant mortality rates in Kerala and Madhya Pradesh: *Sample Registration System Bulletin*, 32(2), April 1998, p.1 (the reference year is 1996).

p. 6: Tagore on education: Tagore (1908). The definition quoted in the text is not *verbatim*, but attempts to convey the spirit of his extended comment on the meaning of education.

## Chapter 2

p. 9: (1) Literates, age 7 and above: Census of India 1991 (see e.g. Tyagi, 1993, p.24). (2) Proportion of adults who have completed eight years of schooling: Calculated from NFHS data presented in International Institute for Population Sciences (1995a, 1995b). (3) Number and proportion of out-of-school children: Calculated from NFHS data in International Institute for Population Sciences (1995), p.56, and age-distribution data in NCERT (1997a), p.10.

p. 11: Proportion of districts where a majority of children aged 10-14 are illiterate: Census of India 1991 (unpublished data supplied by the Office of the Registrar-General).

p. 11: Gender gaps in literacy: *Human Development Report 1998*, pp. 131-3.

p. 14: Number of child labourers: Bandhua Mukti Morcha, quoted in *The Times of India*, 17 August, p.5. Coalition Against Child Labour (1997), 'Public Hearing on Child Labour: Reference Kit', document prepared for the 2nd National Convention of Child Labourers, New Delhi, 30-1 March 1997.

p. 17: School availability in hamlets: NCERT (1997a), Table V.13 (pp. 28-9).

## Chapter 5

p. 55: Proportion of female teachers in Kerala and Sri Lanka: Government of India (1997), p.42; *Human Development in South Asia 1998*, p. 118.

## Chapter 6

p. 81: Quotation : Krishna Kumar (1989).

## Chapter 7

p. 86: Interdependence of Operation Blackboard components: Government of India (1994), *Development of Education in India 1993-94* (New Delhi: Department of Education), p.50.

p. 94: Literacy rates and school attendance in the UP hills: Census of India 1991 (unpublished data supplied by the Office of the Registrar-General).

## Chapter 8

p. 99: Number of NFE centres in India: Department of Education, *Annual Report 1996-7*, p. 36.

p. 101: Proportion of population living in hamlets of less than 300 persons and more than one km away from the nearest school: calculated from NCERT (1997a), Table V.10.

## Chapter 9

p. 115: Literacy rates in Himachal Pradesh and India: Census of India, *Social and Cultural Tables*, various years.

p. 116: Settlement pattern in Himachal Pradesh: NCERT (1997a), Table V-9. The proportion of the rural population living in villages of less than 300 residents is 31 per cent in Himachal Pradesh, compared with 3.4 per cent in India as a whole.

p. 117: Literacy rates in Jhunjhunu: Census of India 1991 (see Tyagi, 1993, p.38). Prominence of army jobs in Jhunjhunu: Manabi Majumdar (1997).

p. 117: Literacy rates in Punjab: Census of India 1991 (unpublished data supplied by the Office of the Registrar-General).

p. 120: Proportion of single-teacher schools in Himachal Pradesh: 1986 figure from Fifth All-India Educational Survey (see Tyagi, 1993, p. 88). The 1995 figure is from the HP government's response to Question 284 in the State Assembly, 1995.

p. 127: States with more than 85 per cent school attendance: NFHS data from International Institute for Population Sciences (1995a), p. 56. Literacy rates in Arunachal Pradesh, 1961: census data presented in Bose (1991), p.112.

## **Chapter 10**

p. 131: Incidence of private schools in Lucknow: Kingdon (1994).

p. 138: Lenin on literacy: quoted in Ramachandran (1996), p.256.



# glossary

Words in common usage not explained in the text :

<i>adivasi</i>	tribal
<i>banyan</i>	vest
<i>beedi</i>	tobacco rolled in a tobacco leaf to be smoked
<i>bhatti</i>	kiln
<i>bigha</i>	a measure of land (ranging from 0.25 to 0.625 acre)
<i>chana</i>	gram
<i>chappals</i>	sandals
<i>chimni</i>	chimney
<i>daal</i>	lentils
<i>daru</i>	liquor
<i>daroga</i>	constable
<i>dharamsala</i>	resthouse for pilgrims/travellers
<i>dhobi</i>	washerman
<i>goonda</i>	hooligan
<i>guruji</i>	teacher
<i>hisab-kitab</i>	accounts
<i>jari</i>	gold threadwork
<i>jhuggi</i>	hut
<i>kachcha</i>	structure which is not <i>pacca</i>
<i>khichdi</i>	rice and lentils cooked together
<i>kholi</i>	hut/small room
<i>khurpi</i>	small gardening tool
<i>kunji</i>	guide-book
<i>lathi</i>	club, stick
<i>mahila mandal</i>	women's group
<i>mantra</i>	incantation
<i>paan</i>	betel leaf
<i>pacca</i>	permanent structure made of bricks or stone
<i>panchayat</i>	village council
<i>panchayati raj</i>	local self-governance by village council
<i>panchayat ghar</i>	place where panchayat meeting is held
<i>purdah</i>	system of veiling the face of a woman in the presence of menfolk
<i>raksha bandhan</i>	popular festival where sisters tie a talisman ( <i>rakhi</i> ) on the wrist of their brothers
<i>roti</i>	bread
<i>sabzi</i>	vegetable
<i>sarkari</i>	government
<i>sarpanch</i>	village headman
<i>shiksha</i>	education
<i>suraksha</i>	security
<i>swasthya</i>	health
<i>zila parishad</i>	district council

# bibliographical note

The PROBE report makes use of a number of background papers and invited contributions. These are listed in the first two sections of this bibliographical note. Other sources are listed in the third section.

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