

# **SINGLE TEACHER SCHOOL**

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

GOVT. OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

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## FOREWORD

Interest in problems of Indian education has been continually on the increase since the attainment of independence. Workers within the country are anxious to know what steps are being taken to eradicate some of the known defects of the systems that prevailed in the past. Governments, private organisations and educationists in foreign countries want to know what steps India is taking to equip her citizens for participation in democratic Government. Enlightened opinion, both at home and abroad, recognises that the solution to our problems of poverty, ill health and low standards of life may well lie in the development of an adequate system of education for the country. The evolution of such a system will have to be based on a survey of our educational attainments till now and comparison with educational practices in other countries of the world.

As a small contribution towards this work of national importance, the Ministry of Education has for some time had under contemplation a scheme for the publication of a series of brochures dealing with different aspects of education in the country. It is proposed to draw for the purpose on the knowledge and experience of educationists and teachers of standing and invite them to survey prevailing educational practice and examine basic educational concepts. These brochures are meant to be first-hand and concise accounts of observations, experiences and experiments in specific fields and not mere summaries of material published elsewhere. Based on the knowledge and experience of the writers, they will supply to educational workers in the country as well as abroad significant information about our educational developments and plans.

The present pamphlet on *The Single-Teacher School* is the first publication in this series. The author has given a brief historical account of such schools and attempted to assess their utility in present day India. He has pointed out that such schools have existed here since the earliest days and in view of the distribution of the population in a large number of villages, are likely to remain a permanent feature of our educational landscape. The recognition that they are, perhaps, indispensable in the Indian context demands that we study them with a view to improve their status and performance. The author has drawn upon the experience of countries like the United States of America, Sweden and

Australia to suggest lines of administrative and pedagogic reform. He has also stressed the importance of organising experimental single-teacher schools under competent supervision in order to evolve better teaching techniques and administrative procedures.

The provision of universal free basic education is a declared objective of the Indian Constitution. The author holds that since a majority of our villages can afford only single-teacher schools, this obligation can be best met by developing them on scientific lines. A careful examination of their potentialities must, therefore, be a high priority in our programme of educational reconstruction. It is hoped that the present pamphlet will prove a useful contribution towards such study.

HUMAYUN KABIR

## CHAPTER I

### Historical Background

Single-teacher schools are one of India's oldest traditions in education. In the Vedic Period, for instance, education was mostly a family affair and ordinarily, each father used to initiate his son into the Vedic lore and the profession of his caste.<sup>1</sup> This system of education in the family or of *domestic instruction* as it came to be styled in educational literature, continued to survive right down to the middle of the nineteenth century. Adam found it very common in Bengal and his investigations revealed that there were 1747 *Centres of Domestic Instruction* as against 373 "schools" proper in the intensively studied areas of Bengal and Bihar.<sup>2</sup> Munro found that the system was very common in Madras City and that for every pupil reading in a school proper, there were five under domestic instruction.<sup>3</sup> The Collector of Kanara reported that so many children in that district were taught at home that any report about the number of schools proper or of pupils attending there would not only be of little or no use, but on the contrary, fallacious.<sup>4</sup> Although such references to the system are rather scanty in official literature, there is reason to believe that it prevailed extensively in all parts of India; and it must be noted that all "Centres of Domestic Instruction" were single-teacher schools.

Later on when society began to be organised on the basis of the division of labour, the system of domestic instruction receded into the background and "schools" proper conducted by professional teachers began to come into existence. But the tradition of *single* teachers was so deeply rooted that instead of combining with others to found "Colleges" or "Universities", the average Indian teacher chose to ply his profession entirely on his own. At Takshashila, the most important seat of learning in ancient India, hundreds of students from all parts of northern India flocked together for higher education; but neither a College nor a University came into existence. "Every teacher, assisted by his advanced students, formed an institution by himself".<sup>5</sup> Even at Banaras which has been a centre of education for over two thousand years and where hundreds of students gathered from all parts of India, each teacher generally worked on his own. As late as the 17th century, Bernier thus describes

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<sup>1</sup>S. L. Audichya : Village Administration in Ancient India, p. 15—date of publication.

<sup>2</sup>Nurullah and Naik : History of Education in India during the British Period, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>A. S. Altekar : Education in Ancient India, p. 251.

the single-teacher institutions of this city : " Banaras is a kind of University, but it has no college or regular classes as in our Universities. It resembles rather the schools of the ancients, the masters being spread over the different parts of the town in private houses ..... Some teachers have four and some six disciples ; the most eminent may have 12 or 15, but this is the largest number ".<sup>6</sup>

The same tradition is also found surviving in the system of indigenous education which prevailed so widely in all parts of India prior to the advent of British rule. Adam found that almost all the indigenous schools were single-teacher institutions and in his writings, one frequently comes across his favourite phrase, " the number of teachers is the same as the number of schools ".<sup>7</sup> The enquiries in Bombay and Madras also show the same almost exclusive predominance of single-teacher schools.<sup>8</sup> It may, therefore, be concluded that the average indigenous school in all parts of India was a single-teacher institution.

The foregoing evidence shows that ever since the earliest Vedic times, single-teacher schools have existed in India and, except for the microscopic minority of a few multi-teacher institutions, they have always monopolised the whole field of education.

Peculiar social conditions have been mainly responsible for the existence of this type of school. The number of children to be educated in a place was generally so small that a single-teacher institution was all that could come into existence. In bigger places, it was, of course, possible to put together a large number of children desiring to study ; but family loyalties came in the way. Families usually had a hereditary association with certain families of teachers and they just chose a teacher on the same traditional basis that led to the choice of a priest. Consequently, what actually grew up in the locality was not a big multi-teacher school but a number of single-teacher institutions. The predominance of single-teacher schools was partly due to an old educational theory that the relations between the teacher and the student should be most intimate<sup>9</sup> (a single-teacher school definitely secured this end and secured it better than a big multi-teacher school), and partly to an individualism which stands in the way of working out cooperative projects. But whatever the causes may be, instructions on the single-teacher

<sup>6</sup>*Bernier* : Travels in India, p. 341.

<sup>7</sup>*William Adam* : Reports on the State of Education in Bengal and Bihar (1835-38).

<sup>8</sup>*R. V. Parulekar* : Survey of Indigenous Education in the State of Bombay (1820-30) and *A.J. Arbuthnot* : Selections from the Records of the Government of Madras, No. 11.

*A. S. Altekar* : op. cit., pp. 63-81.



basis had both good and bad results. On the one hand, it led to a lamentable failure to institutionalise education and to establish colleges and universities in spite of a very careful and large-scale attempt to preserve ancient culture. On the other hand, it developed three great educational values : close intimacy between the teacher and the student ; greater individual attention, which was mainly due to the small number of students ; and the monitorial method of teaching.

All these ancient educational values survived till the modern period and were characteristic of all indigenous educational institutions at the advent of British rule. The relations between the teacher and pupils were always homely and intimate, in spite of the severe punishments adopted in elementary schools.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the size of the school was always small. In Bombay, the average number of pupils per school was 35 in Gujerat, 20 in Konkan, and 15 in the rest of the State.<sup>11</sup> Adam found similar conditions. He enumerated 2,567 schools with 30,915 pupils, which works out at about 12 pupils per school ; and in Centres of Domestic Instruction, the average number of pupils varied from 1,225 in Bhawara to 1,423 in Culna.<sup>12</sup> Similar conditions probably prevailed in the rest of India as well. This small number of pupils per teacher made individual instruction possible. The "class", which is really a method of mass production that has come into vogue especially after the Industrial Revolution, was then unknown. Instead, each pupil formed the unit of instruction. He joined the school at any time of the year and at any age ; very often, he brought his own curriculum too, because the parents occasionally dictated what their boys had to be taught ; while at school, he received instruction according to his own needs and pace of progress and could pass from one unit of study to another irrespective of the progress of others ; and he was free to leave the school at any time as soon as he had learnt all that he desired to know or that the school had to teach. Modern education dislodged this method of individual instruction and replaced it by the "class" ; but it has since realised the disservice done and now seems to be anxious to ring the knell of class-teaching and to go back to individual instruction ; or if that were not possible, it at least desires to reduce the size of the class and to combine class-teaching with individual attention. Those who decry indigenous schools as inefficient may do well to remember that some aspects of their teaching were as "progressive" as those of the best schools of today.

The head of a single-teacher school has to manage four or five different classes at a time and, to many persons, it seems a very difficult or almost impossible task. But it must be remembered that our teachers of ancient times had an even

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<sup>10</sup> *Nurullah and Naik* : op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> *R. V. Parulekar* : op. cit., p. xxii.

<sup>12</sup> *Nurullah and Naik* : op. cit., pp. 29-31

more difficult task to perform. Although each of them had to manage about 15 pupils, each pupil was a class by himself and was often at a different stage of progress. To meet this situation, therefore, they evolved a very interesting method known as the *monitorial system*. Under this plan, the senior pupils were required, for some time every day, to instruct the junior ones. The teacher thus took successive pupils or groups of pupils and, in the meanwhile, kept the rest of the school busy either over some assignment or by making the "monitors" teach the less advanced pupils. Several variations of the plan were in vogue ; but one of the most interesting was the practice of pairing off pupils. "What chiefly distinguishes the Hindoo schools", wrote the Bombay Education Society in their Report for 1817, "is the plan of instruction by the scholars themselves. When a boy (the girls are never taught to read and write amongst the Natives of India) joins the school, he is immediately put under the tuition and care of one who is more advanced in knowledge, and whose duty it is to give lessons to his young pupil, to assist him in learning, and to report his behaviour and progress to the master. The scholars are not classed, but are generally paired off, each pair consisting of an instructor and a pupil. These pairs are so arranged that a boy less advanced may sit next to one who has made greater progress, and from whom he receives assistance and instruction. When, however, several of the older boys have made considerable and nearly equal progress, they are seated together in one line and receive their instruction directly from the master ; by these methods the master has sufficient leisure to exercise a vigilant superintendence on the school and of enquiring into the progress made by each pupil under his instruction".<sup>13</sup>

This system first came to the notice of the Rev. Dr. Andrew Bell, Chaplain of Madras. He was so impressed by its effectiveness and by its capacity to reduce the cost of education by increasing the number of pupils per teacher that he introduced it into England where it was known as the monitorial or even the *Madras system*. Several contemporary documents admit this contribution which the indigenous system of education in India made to the spread of mass education in England. For instance, in 1814, the Court of Directors recommended the system to the Governor-General-in-Council of Bengal. "The mode of instruction", they wrote, "that from time immemorial has been practised under these masters has received the highest tribute of praise by its adoption in this country, under the direction of the Reverend Dr. Bell, formerly Chaplain at Madras and it is now become the mode by which education is conducted in our national establishments, from a conviction of the facility it affords in the acquisition of language by simplifying the process of instruction".<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> R. V. Parulekar : op. cit., p. xxxvi.

<sup>14</sup> Sharp : Selections from Educational Records, Vol. I, p. 23.

Apart from its economic value as a means of raising the teacher-pupil ratio, it is possible to argue, on purely educational grounds, that the monitorial system is a good device that should have much wider recognition and use at our hands. Even its worst opponents would find it difficult to deny that it makes things easy for the teacher when obstinate economic factors make the ratio of pupil to teacher large, and when the existence of small villages superimposes an additional difficulty, *viz.*, the need to handle a number of classes simultaneously. Moreover, it has several advantages for the pupils as well. Like the quality of mercy it is twice blessed; it blesses him that teaches as well as him that learns; and once the "rapport" between the pupils concerned is established, it makes learning a playful adventure with fellow comrades and fully compensates for all the deficiencies of the child-teacher's lack of professional training and technique. Within the domain of formal instruction, it may be described, by a slight variation of a common slogan, as the method of "learning by teaching"; and it has been recently revived in an altogether unexpected context by the well-known educationist missionary, Dr. Frank Laubach, who devised the method of "each one, teach one" to spread literacy among adults.<sup>15</sup> At any rate, it would certainly be wrong to set the monitorial system aside as "crude and antediluvian" without a further enquiry.

The object of this rather lengthy discussion has been to show that single-teacher schools have been an old tradition in Indian education and *not*, as some European critics of Indian education would have us believe, an evil that arose as a result of the transfer of education to Indian control in 1921;<sup>16</sup> and that our past traditions have evolved methods and forged tools that will, with some modifications, still enable us to overcome some of the teaching difficulties they create. If properly approached, therefore, these past traditions will not only take away the "bogey" aspect of single-teacher schools but will also show some ways to improve their conditions and status.

### **The Modern Era (1813-1921)**

When the first attempts to organise primary education under the East India Company began to be made in the years following the Charter Act of 1813, the old tradition of single-teacher schools was adopted as a '*modus operandi*' by the new system as well. In the State of Bombay, for example, almost all the primary schools established by the Bombay Native Education Society between 1823 and 1840 and by the Board of Education between 1840 and 1854, were single-teacher schools. The rules on the subject provided that the monthly salary of the teachers was to be regulated on the basis of the number of pupils, *i.e.*, Rs. 10 for schools of 50 children or less; Rs. 12 for 50 to 70 children; Rs. 15 for 70 to 90 children; and Rs. 20 for schools with

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<sup>15</sup> Laubach : *Toward a Literate World*, p.

<sup>16</sup> See pp. *infra*.

more than 90 pupils.<sup>17</sup> The implication obviously is that, as a rule, only one teacher was to be appointed to look after a primary school. He was expected to adopt the monitorial system if the number of pupils was large; and the cases when an additional teacher was appointed were so few that they did not vitiate the general statement that, in 1855, almost all the Government primary schools in the State of Bombay were single-teacher institutions.

This fact becomes all the more impressive if it is remembered that these schools were situated, not in small villages where single-teacher schools become inevitable, but in places which, by our modern standards can only be regarded as urban or semi-urban. The enrolment of pupils was generally large, the average number of children per school being 68 in 1855; the classes varied from 6 to 10; and yet they were all managed by single-teachers and were held to be working satisfactorily. Similarly, in Madras, the District and Tahsildaree schools of Munro were all single-teacher institutions although they were located at District and Tahsil headquarters.<sup>18</sup> The Halkabandi schools established by Thomason in the North Western Provinces were also single-teacher schools.<sup>19</sup> There is, therefore, enough evidence to conclude that single-teacher primary schools were the order of the day in the modern system of education prior to 1855.

In that year, the Education Departments came into existence under Wood's Education Despatch and they remained in supreme control of educational activities till 1921. During this period of about 65 years, single-teacher schools gradually receded into the background. Of the various factors that brought about this change, three may be mentioned here. The first was the expansion of education which brought more and more children to schools so that, under the pressure of a sheer increase in numbers, additional teachers had to be appointed and single-teacher schools had to be converted into multi-teacher institutions.

Secondly, education was restricted in extent, throughout this period, to urban areas and the bigger villages, i.e., places where the need of starting single-teacher schools was obviously less.

But the most important factor which reduced the number of single-teacher schools was the third, *viz.*, the abandonment of the monitorial system and the reduction in the size of the average class. Both these "reforms" were adopted in a desire to imitate English precedents. When England gave up the monitorial system and decided to adopt smaller classes, Indian educators followed suit. They forgot, however, that England decided to give up economy devices like the monitorial system or larger class units *after* her expansion programme had been

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<sup>17</sup> Report of the Board of Education, 1841, p. 130.

<sup>18</sup> Selections from Educational Records, Vol. I, p. 75.

<sup>19</sup> Selections from Educational Records, Vol. II, p. 231.

almost completed and *after* her national dividend had increased to such an extent that she could afford to bear the increased financial liability of these reforms without whittling down any programme of mass education. India, on the other hand, had yet a long way to go to achieve complete expansion; not only her poverty but population was increasing at a very rapid rate; and therefore, her ability to support a programme of universal education was decreasing rather than increasing and she needed all the old economy devices more urgently than at any time in the past. But these socio-economic differences between England and India were ignored and the English ideas of smaller classes and full-time direct instruction by teachers were blindly adopted in India. Consequently, several schools which would have been continued in charge of single teachers in the past were now provided with two or more teachers. As a result of all these factors, the percentage of single-teacher schools decreased considerably between 1855 and 1921—the period of the supreme authority of the Education Departments.

There is no need to regret this reduction. It was, in a way, inevitable and there is no denying the fact that it did secure some qualitative improvement. But even more satisfactory is the fact that this reduction did not imply any hostility towards them. The single-teacher school phobia which was so characteristic of the Department in the twenties and thirties of the present century was then unknown, and the Department accepted them unquestioningly as a necessary part of their organisation. It is also significant that none of the documents of this period refer to them as weak institutions which cause waste. The Indian Education Commission of 1822 submitted a voluminous report of more than 700 pages of foolscap size which dealt specially with the problems of primary education. But it made no mention of single-teacher schools at all! Curzon's Review of Education in 1904 also makes no reference to them. It is said that Curzon touched every aspect of education and touched nothing that he did not reform. It is, therefore, reasonable to suppose that if the Department had then entertained a small fraction of the hostility it later developed towards single-teacher schools, Curzon would certainly have said and done something about them. But apparently they were regarded as so innocuous at this time that they failed to receive any treatment at his hands. Even the Government of India Resolution on Educational Policy dated 21st February, 1913, makes no reference to single-teacher schools. The Quinquennial Reviews of the Progress of Education in India issued between 1886 and 1917 also do not refer to the problem. It may, therefore, be said that, throughout the years from 1855 to 1921 the Education Department did not, at any time, consider that single-teacher schools were harmful institutions that deserved little short of complete elimination.

Two important developments of this period were, however, indirectly inimical to single-teacher schools. The first of these was the introduction of "classes" with regular graded curricula and annual promotions. This concept also was adopted from

English precedents. Indians, long accustomed to treating the whole school as one class and each pupil as a unit of instruction, did not like the reform. But their voice counted for little and "classes" did become the order of the day very soon.

In an urban centre, large schools can be easily established and one teacher can be placed in charge of a class. The class system, therefore, worked well in big schools where one teacher was called upon to manage one, or at the most, two classes. But when the single-teacher of a rural school was asked to adopt the plan, superhuman difficulties stared him in the face. He had to manage four or five classes at a time; arrange a time-table for each class according to subjects and periods; and try to keep every pupil as fully busy as possible throughout the school period. His task, therefore, was like that of a chess player who had to play a number of games simultaneously. In fact, it was even more strenuous because children are more difficult to manage than chess-pieces. Discarding the monitorial system increased these instructional difficulties still further and there is little wonder that the average teacher who was generally untrained and poorly educated and who obtained little or no assistance from the inspecting staff, failed to perform his duties properly. Secondly, the curriculum of primary schools was revised every now and then throughout the period under review. The oldest syllabus was also the simplest and was mainly confined to the three R's. But at each successive revision, it was amplified because contemporary England was in process of revising her syllabus in a similar manner. New subjects were introduced; higher standards were expected in subjects already taught; and on the whole, an attempt was made to crowd as many things as possible into the primary curriculum.

There is nothing basically wrong in this trend; but the trouble for single-teacher schools arose out of an error of omission connected with this reform. The curriculum was generally prepared for *urban* schools and with *urban* conditions in view. Here, the teachers were better qualified; the pupils came from better surroundings; it was possible to place a teacher in charge of one or two classes; and the attendance was far more regular than in rural areas. The solitary teacher of the small village school, therefore, could never be expected to teach such an ambitious course with his handicaps and in an unhelpful environment. But no thought was given to this aspect of the problem; no attempt was made to evolve a separate curriculum for single-teacher rural schools: and they were expected to follow the same curriculum as was prescribed for urban schools and to attain the same standards by adopting the same methods. When they failed to do so, the failure was attributed, *not* to the impossible standards expected of them, but to the inefficiency of the single-teacher schools. This was especially the case after 1902 when "the improvement of the quality of instruction" became the greatest slogan of the departmental officials.

Both these developments, therefore, made the single-teacher schools cut a poorer figure in comparison with the more fortunate institutions in urban areas and a feeling began to grow that the work of the single-teacher schools was not satisfactory and that something had to be done about it. It remained suppressed so long as the Department ruled the situation; but as soon as education was transferred, in 1921, to the control of Indian Ministers, the simmering dissatisfaction burst in all its vehemence, and it now began to be argued that single-teacher schools were so inefficient that they should be scrapped altogether. Thus began a controversy which held the field for about two decades and which materially hampered the progress of the small rural schools on sound educational lines.

### **The Controversy (1921-47)**

The first shot in the controversy was fired by the *Review of the Progress of Education in India* (1917-22). This document really covers the quinquennium immediately prior to the transfer of education to Indian control; but it was actually published *after* the transfer and, consequently, made a mild start in a controversy which was about to burst forth in full vigour. It categorically stated that the inefficiency of the ordinary village school was due, among other things, to the excessive number of classes assigned to a single teacher. "The village school master", it observed, "ill framed in vitality and learning and depressed by poverty, is in sole charge of a school of five classes or sections which he has to instruct in all the subjects of a varied course. There is no fixed date of admission. Pupils come in month by month according to caprice or the influence of their horoscopes. The lower class, a class in which numbers are high, is a collection of little groups, each at a different stage of advancement. And there are four classes above this". In spite of this comment, the Review made no suggestion for the elimination of the single-teacher schools. It only pitied the solitary teacher who was to face a difficult job and declared that "the most skilful teacher of either sex would be disheartened if placed in sole charge of a village primary school."<sup>21</sup>

But the severest of all attacks was launched soon afterwards by the Royal Commission on Agriculture (1928). "We entirely agree", they wrote. "with those educational authorities who hold that no primary school can be efficient which has less than two teachers. Unless the school which has at present one teacher can be provided with an additional teacher or converted into a branch school consisting of one or two classes only, with the object of providing teaching for young children until they are old enough to walk to the central school, it is better closed, for it is both ineffective and extravagant. We realise that financial

<sup>20</sup>This was mainly because of political reasons which will be discussed later.

<sup>21</sup>Para 214.

considerations militate against the provision of a second teacher for the small primary school. It is estimated that the minimum number of pupils required for the primary school from the point of view of economical administration is about a hundred, whereas the average number attending each primary school at the end of 1925-26 was only 43. But nothing is to be gained by failure to face the fact that a village which has a primary school with only one teacher might almost as well be without a school at all. We, therefore, recommend that, wherever possible, the policy of establishing 'central' schools and of converting 'single-teacher' schools into 'branch' schools should be adopted".<sup>22</sup> This was a strong and wholesale condemnation of a system which had survived for centuries and the pity is that it was entirely based on 'opinions'. No scientific investigations had been carried out to test the relative efficiency of single-teacher schools as against multi-teacher ones, nor were any such investigations suggested or discussed. Even the evidence of analogy, *viz.*, the existence of good single-teacher schools in large numbers in countries like U.S.A., Canada and Australia was totally ignored; and an impossible fiat which could not but do incalculable harm to the progress of rural education was issued by the very organisation which appeared to have attached the greatest importance to its progress.

A little later appeared the Report of the Hartog Committee which was equally damaging to the future of single-teacher schools (1929). It agreed that, "in favourable circumstances, with a good teacher trained in methods of plural class teaching, a school of this type serves a useful purpose";<sup>23</sup> and that single-teacher schools were then too numerous to be *all* replaced or remodelled within a short time.<sup>24</sup> All the same, it agreed with the view of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and felt that there is not "much promise of effective progress in a system which depends so predominantly on schools of this type."<sup>25</sup> It, therefore, deprecated the tendency seen in States like Madras, Bihar and Bengal "to regard the multiplication of schools of the single-teacher type as the easiest, if not the best, way of providing facilities for primary education."<sup>25</sup>

In the face of such a hostile attitude, it is naturally impossible to expect any useful suggestions from this Report. But it did make two valuable recommendations. The first is the conversion of the single-teacher school into a *branch school* teaching two classes only. Under this plan, a multi-teacher Central School located in a big village teaches the whole primary course. In the small villages of the neighbourhood, a branch of the Central School is started, instead of an independent school, and it teaches the lower two standards only. The young children of

<sup>22</sup>Report, pp. 525-26.

<sup>23</sup>Report, p. 61.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid*, p. 79.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 61-2.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid*, p. 61.



the village can thus attend a school in their own village and when grown up, they are expected to attend the central school. It was, therefore, claimed that, in this plan, the number of classes in a single-teacher school was reduced without creating an obstacle in the expansion of primary education.<sup>27</sup> Secondly, it recommended that teachers should be trained in plural class teaching. "In view of the very large number of existing single-teacher schools", the Committee said, "and in view of the fact that these schools cannot be all replaced or remodelled for a considerable time, the system adopted in Bombay and Assam of giving special instruction in the training schools in the methods of plural class teaching (i.e., the way in which one teacher can best do justice to each of the several classes of which he is in charge) is obviously beneficial. Suitable training in the handling of more than one class should not only improve the teaching in single-teacher schools, but also provide valuable guidance to the teachers now working in *branch schools*".<sup>28</sup> The merits of these recommendations will be discussed later. But they were obviously tame and transitional in character and did not disguise the fundamental hostility of the Committee to the single-teacher schools.

One wonders why the Department which put up with single-teacher schools without a word of protest from 1855 to 1921 should so vehemently criticise them within less than a decade of the transfer of control to Indian Ministers. A careful study of the evidence available shows that the reasons were unfortunately political rather than educational. The transfer of education to Indian control was not liked by several European members of the Indian Educational Service, especially as they were now required to serve under an Indian Head. They were, therefore, very eager to show that the cause of education had suffered by transfer to Indian control.

This desire was also shared by imperialistic elements. The Declaration of 20th August, 1917, had stated that Indians would be given self-rule by stages and that the *time* and *extent* of each stage of advance would depend upon a number of factors among which the growth of education would be one. Friends of the Empire, therefore, felt that it would serve their purpose to show that Indian Ministers had mishandled education, and this was the whole burden of the Hartog Report which condemned the expansionist policies followed by Indian Ministers as wasteful and ineffective. At this time, it was only the small villages that were without schools, and the only way to provide them with essential educational facilities was to begin by starting single-teacher schools. The Indian Ministers naturally adopted this inescapable device; and the officials who were out to show that the ministerial policies were wrong, started a fusillade against

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<sup>27</sup> The idea was not new. The Committee took it from the Punjab which was trying it out on a large scale and had, at this time, as many as 2,707 branch schools.

the very idea of the single-teacher school. It is very necessary to remember this political background because it conclusively shows that not much weight need be attached to the opinions of those who, at this time, tried to create a prejudice against single-teacher schools *without* undertaking or carrying out any scientific investigation whatsoever into the subject.

The Reports of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and the Hartog Committee started the war to end the single-teacher schools and their advice was followed literally in several areas. Some States which had already started action on the lines now obtained moral support to strengthen their campaign and others joined afresh in the warfare. The most important of these was Madras. Here the Ministry had accepted the recommendation of a conference held in 1923 to the effect that the expansion of primary education should be brought about by the multiplication of single-teacher schools. Accordingly, 825 such schools were started in 1924, 2,038 in 1925 and 1,508 in 1926. The same policy of expansion continued to be in "full swing" till 1930. Thereafter, mainly owing to these adverse Reports, the tide began to turn and Government adopted a policy of concentration and elimination. The result was the closure of a large number of single-teacher schools and, therefore, the total number of primary schools decreased from 46,389 in 1926-27 to 41,141 in 1936-37. This obviously meant a great setback; but the Director was glad of his achievement in eliminating a large number of "inefficient, uneconomic, and superfluous schools" countenanced in the expansion drive organised between 1920 and 1930.<sup>29</sup> Even the Government of India complimented him and the Quinquennial Review for 1932-37 declared that "commendable action" had been taken in Madras "to prevent the sanction of increased grants to single-teacher schools".<sup>30</sup> The Punjab made a heroic start. In 1922, it had as many as 2,754 single-teacher schools; but within a few years, their number was reduced to less than 500. But this policy could not be kept up and by 1936-37, it again rose to 1,802 or 31.0 per cent. of the total number of primary schools.

Uttar Pradesh also followed Madras and tried to eliminate single-teacher schools. Between 1922 and 1932, the number of primary schools had increased from 16,800 to 21,700. But owing to the change of policy, it decreased to 19,200 in 1945. In 1927, the percentage of single-teacher schools was 50. It came down to 20 in 1945. But what a tremendous setback this policy meant to educational progress may be easily imagined. By far the most strenuous attempts in this direction were made in the Baroda State. Almost all the single-teacher schools were abolished, either by closure or by the appointment of an additional teacher, and a rule was adopted to the effect that no new primary school would be opened unless, there were at least 75 children to attend it.

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<sup>29</sup> Report for 1936-37, p. 86.

<sup>30</sup> Vol. I, p. 134.

The results were disastrous. The total number of primary schools in the State fell from 2,996 in 1926-27 to 2,542 in 1937-38. In the latter year, the number of single-teacher schools was only 33. As many as 1,325 small villages (out of a total of 2,969 in the State) which could not manage to send 75 children to a school and whose population was 4,95,347 or 21 p.c. of the total population had no educational facilities whatsoever. It is all the more unfortunate that these villages were largely inhabited by backward tribes like the Rani Paraj who needed education most and it was precisely they that were denied of it under this policy.<sup>31</sup> Some other States also made a few attempts to eliminate the single-teacher schools or to reduce their number. But none of them obtained any success whatsoever. The single-teacher school persisted with a dogged obstinacy and, in deference to public pressure for educational expansion, even tended to increase in numbers. The only result of the ill-advised attempts to eliminate the single-teacher schools, therefore, was to hold up the pace of expansion and to deny educational opportunities to the small and backward villages which needed them most.

Even while such attempts to realise the impossible were going on, good thinkers had already started an agitation against the attempt to eliminate the single-teacher schools. The lead in the matter came from J. A. Richey whose name holds a place of honour in Indian educational history as that of a competent and sympathetic officer who gave serious thought to several educational problems. As early as 1929, he wrote an article in the 'Asiatic Review' in which he suggested that an attempt should be made to *improve* single-teacher schools. He admitted that the solitary teacher in charge of a village school had a very difficult task to perform; but he did not think it impossible. "If these statements (i.e. that single-teacher schools can never be improved and, therefore, are better eliminated) are true", he wrote, "we may well despair of the future of rural education in India; for nothing is more certain than that if education is ultimately to reach the more backward and sparsely inhabited tracts, it must be by means of the single-teacher schools. No other type is economically possible. But, of course, these statements are very exaggerated. We have evidence enough in the thousand good single-teacher schools in the United States, Canada, Australia and South Africa. I have inspected a number of such schools in South Africa, and more, I have visited many good single-teacher schools in India itself".<sup>32</sup>

Another educationist who voiced his protest was Shri N. S. Subba Rao, the Director of Public Instruction in Mysore, who took his stand on the persistence of the single-teacher school in very large numbers in U.S.A. and said: "If this is the condition of the things in a country so rich and so well provided

<sup>31</sup> J. P. Naik : Compulsory Primary Education in Baroda State (Progress of Education, Poona, February, 1941).

<sup>32</sup> Asiatic Review, January 1929, p. 89.

with excellent means of communications as the United States of America, any scheme of reorganisation and consolidation in Mysore or India where single-teacher schools are numerous, must accept, for years to come, such schools as an inevitable part of the scheme of things and attempt to attain the maximum possible efficiency on the basis of such schools".<sup>33</sup> Similar sentiments were also expressed by Mr. R. Littlehales who, at the invitation of the State Government, submitted a detailed report on the reconstruction of education in Baroda. He strongly condemned the drive undertaken by the State to eliminate single-teacher schools and said :

"Single-teacher schools under a trained teacher may be quite satisfactory ; they are not objectionable. I should go further and allow temporarily single-teacher schools under untrained teachers, and knowing that a school once closed down is difficult to resuscitate, would not close a school merely because its single teacher was untrained. The policy of the department has been to abolish single-teacher schools and only a few remain, about 60 in number, ten of which are not working. Many schools which were formerly provided with only a single teacher have been closed, others have been provided with an additional teacher. This policy I submit is not for the good of the country, especially in its present stage of educational advancement. In places where the school has been closed, facilities for education no longer exist and the children remain illiterate. In places where an additional teacher has been added, though the individual instruction given to pupils may have been slightly improved, the strength of the school has not been appreciably increased ; it has certainly not doubled ; furthermore, the cost of the school has increased twofold though the instruction given has not improved to anything like the same extent".

"There will always be small villages where the employment of only a single-teacher is all that can be economically justified, and wastage in school effort will always be with us, especially when illiteracy is large, so that single-teacher schools will have to remain in parts of Baroda just as they remain in small and out-of-the-way villages in other parts of the world. What is desirable is that where a single-teacher school exists, the teacher should be conscientious in character and trained. It has not been found impossible in other countries for a single-teacher to conduct several small classes in a small village ; it should not be impossible in Baroda. I advise the opening of single-teacher schools in places where they have been closed and the transfer to them of trained teachers."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Report of the D.P.I. Mysore, 1933-34, p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> Report on Education in Baroda State, para. 102-03. It must be stated that this recommendation had no effect and the policy of the State continued unchanged.

But by far the greatest of all protests was launched by Shri R. V. Parulekar. He made the most detailed and elaborate study of the important aspects of the problem<sup>35</sup> and concluded that "those who advocate the abolition or amalgamation and consolidation of single-teacher schools have failed to visualise their indispensable place in the frame-work of the Indian educational system", and that "the right approach to the problem is to mend these schools rather than to end them."<sup>36</sup>

This saner view soon began to gain greater ascendancy and its general acceptance was hastened by two factors. The liquidation of the I.E.S. and the retirement of the last European officer from the administrative field at about the same time eliminated a reactionary stronghold; and the assumption of power by the Congress ministries under Provincial Autonomy gave a great fillip to a programme of expanding primary education which necessarily involved a large multiplication of single-teacher schools. The bogey which the Royal Commission on Agriculture raised in 1928 was, therefore, given a final burial by 1947 when India attained independence. Today, hardly any educationist subscribes to the view that single-teacher schools are better eliminated. Their indispensable character is universally recognised, their problems are receiving better and more scientific treatment, and the reformer's emphasis has shifted to the important and difficult problem of their improvement. This is one of the most important of modern trends that augurs well for the future of our rural education.

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<sup>35</sup> *Literacy in India*, Chapter X.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER II

### A Comparative Study

Before turning to the consideration of the more important problems of single-teacher schools and the methods by which their administrative and teaching efficiency can be improved, it is necessary to pause a little and to see if any guidance in the matter can be obtained from the practice of other nations. India is not the only country which has to face the problems of single-teacher schools. As small units of population exist in all nations, single-teacher schools are ubiquitous. But in some countries, their numbers are so small as to be ignored, while in others, they are so numerous that special attention has been paid to their improvement and several research studies and experiments on the subject have been carried out. The experience of this latter group of countries will naturally be of immense use to us in dealing with the problems connected with the subject. Indian educationists interested in the problem, must, therefore, study all the literature available and see if any of the techniques evolved in other nations to deal with the problems of single-teacher schools can as well be adapted to the rural conditions in India.

#### United States of America

Probably, the one country whose experience will be of the greatest use to us is the United States of America because, contrary to popular belief, U.S.A. is more rural than urban. It is true that only about 45 p.c. of the total population in U.S.A. is rural in character; but the urban population has an appreciable majority in 12 States only and in as many as 27 states, it is the rural population which has a majority.<sup>37</sup> Even more significant is the fact that the typical rural school in U.S.A. is a single-teacher institution. The tradition began in the pioneer days when the early colonists lived in small settlements and built a "little red schoolhouse" for their children within almost walking distance of every child. This was a simple institution with a few pupils and a single teacher and, in spite of the march of progressive influences, this old-fashioned rural school still continues to survive in surprising numbers and in surprising places.<sup>38</sup> In several areas, the proportion of single-teacher schools to the total number of primary schools is very large much larger, in fact, than that in India. Miss Wofford, Director of Rural Education, State Teachers' College, Buffalo, N. Y. points out: "According to the Biennial Survey of Education 1937-38 the latest available statistics—there were 229,394 school buildings in use, in the forty-eight states and the District of

<sup>37</sup> *I.E. Schatzmann* : The Country School, p. 137.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

Columbia in 1938. Of this number 52.8 per cent were one-room buildings, the percentages ranging from 7.2 per cent. in Utah to 83 per cent. in South Dakota. One half or more of the school buildings in use in twenty states were one-teacher schools. States with high percentages of one-room schools, are South Dakota, North Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, Montana, Iowa, West Virginia, Michigan, Kentucky, Arkansas, Wyoming, Oregon, and Colorado. In all these states, according to the Survey, 50 per cent or more of the school buildings were one-room structures. A sampling of sixteen states gave an even higher percentage of small schools; 64.77 per cent were one-teacher schools, 17.17 per cent two-teacher, 7.42 per cent three-teacher, 5.39 per cent four-teacher, 2.51 per cent five-teacher, and 2.76 per cent six-teacher schools. In other words, 90.09 per cent of the schools in the states sampled housed their children in schools having six or fewer teachers".<sup>39</sup>

The attention of American educationists was soon drawn to the problem of rural education in general and of the single-teacher school in particular. New ideas were put forward and tried; experimental projects were conducted by universities and other interested organisations; a good deal of research was carried out; and specialised courses in rural education in general and for the teachers of the "small rural school" in particular were instituted. Within a few years, almost every aspect of the problem was studied and literature on the subject was produced in such superabundance as only America can afford. Here, therefore, is a wealth of experience and material which India can draw upon with great advantage.

American educationists, like Indian administrators of the nineteen-twenties, also felt for a time that the best way out of the difficulty would be to establish a central big school to which the children of the neighbourhood could be daily transported, and thereby eliminate a number of single-teacher schools in the locality. This movement, known popularly as the "Consolidation of schools" movement, was in full swing at one time and is still going on to some extent.

It may be pointed out that the concept is not peculiar to U.S.A. but has been, in fact, tried in several countries which had to meet the problem of the small school in a more or less acute form. "The shortcomings incidental to the single school and small administrative areas", writes Mr. F. Tate, "have been a potent factor in the development of the *consolidated Rural School*. Where roads are suitable and where costs of transport are low, it has been found advantageous to close several small schools within a country area and transport the children from their homes each day to a central school. The advantages of such a system in providing better housing and equipment, such as separate classrooms for different grades, laboratories and workshops, a stronger staff of teachers, greater diversity of curriculum, more adequate provision for social and

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<sup>39</sup> Kate V. Wofford : Teaching in small schools, p. 3.

recreational activities, and better value for the money expended are sufficiently obvious to convince local tax-payers and to overcome the natural disinclination of parents to allow their children to travel considerable distances. The Consolidated School in Canada, in the United States, and in England has improved rural education very greatly".<sup>40</sup>

Obviously, this is a plan that involves heavy recurring and non-recurring expenditure; but a country like U.S.A. could adopt it with zest because it had the money to construct the buildings required for the consolidated school as well as to provide daily bus transport for all the pupils. But even in U.S.A., the movement is making slow progress and financial difficulties are felt on several occasions. The policy of American educators, therefore, is to have a consolidated school if and where possible.<sup>41</sup> But they know that thousands of schools cannot be consolidated for several years to come, and hence they have also given considerable thought to the methods of improving single-teacher schools.

It was soon realised that most of the difficulties of the small rural school arose from the fact that its solitary teacher had to manage as many as eight grades at a time. Educators, therefore, began to find out ways and means to restrict the number of grades taught in a single-teacher school to five or four only.

One obvious way to do this was to prevent the small rural school, by law, from teaching any grade higher than IV or V. The lead in trying out this experiment was taken by two States, Louisiana and North Carolina. This plan, it may be incidentally pointed out, is like the branch-school idea recommended by the Hartog Committee. But as things turned out, it did not achieve much. It had to go hand-in-hand with the consolidation of schools for the higher grades, including the establishment of central schools for the purpose, and the organisation of transport for children. But financial and other difficulties came in the way and it was possible to work out the idea only in "favoured localities and under limited conditions."<sup>42</sup>

As an alternative to the above, an attempt was made to halve the number of grades by combining two consecutive grades into one and by adopting a new curriculum to suit the combination. This plan is popularly known as "Combination and Alternation of Grades". Under it, the combination of grades varies according to local needs. Usually, the plan includes the combination of grades III and IV, V and VI, VII and VIII. In the South, because of its elementary school organisation of seven grades the combination usually includes grades II and III, IV

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<sup>40</sup>The Rural School in Australia, pp. 84-5.

<sup>41</sup>*De Young* : Introduction to American Public Education, pp. 87-94.

<sup>42</sup>*Kate V. Wofford* : Modern Education in the small Rural School, p. 82.



and V, VI and VII. Because of its system of Regents Examinations, the State of New York recommends no combination in the grades VII and VIII. Many States do not recommend the combination of grades I and II except for classes other than the tool subjects. The combined grades are usually designated in the new organisation by letters of the alphabet. "A" usually for grades VII and VIII, "B" for grades V and VI, "C" for grades III and IV, "D" for grades I and II. If grades I and II are combined, a school of eight grades becomes organized, under this plan, into four groups which meet as classes. The number of classes is thus reduced by half.

"As a corollary to the reorganization of the programme, a few states have organized their courses of study to fit the combination of grades. Generally, two outlines are furnished the schools for each group of classes: A, B and C. Efforts are made to have the outlines as nearly agree in difficulty as possible, so that children pursue either outline without being too seriously handicapped. The outlines—one for each year—are set up in terms of odd and even years, the children entering in the odd years pursuing the same outline of subject matter found in the regular order of the grades. It is only the children who enter school in the even years who take an indirect route through the grades, pursuing upper grade work before they complete the lower. Thus, a child who enters school for the first time in September 1936 will take the following route; for the first two years of his school life he will remain in his normal grade; that is, for 1936-37 he will be assigned to grade I, in 1937-38 he will be located in grade II. In the fall of 1938 his route will become devious. He will be assigned to Group C and take fourth grade work; in 1939-1940 he will study third grade materials; in 1940-41 he will skip to sixth grade; and in 1941-42 will switch back to the outline for grade five; in 1942-43 he will study and recite in the eighth grade level; and in 1943-44 he will return for his seventh grade materials".<sup>43</sup>

The outline given here represents only a few of the attempts to reduce the number of grades. It should not, however, be supposed that *four* was the lowest number of groupings among the grades. In the experimental school at Quaker Grove, for instance, all eight grades were rearranged in three groups only. "Enrolment in the eight grades of the school ranged from forty to fifty children and obviously an efficiency organization of the school day was immediate and pressing. It was soon realized, however, that the goal involved more than an organization of time since the necessity for grouping grades and children was also present. To meet this exigency, the children were divided into three groups instead of the traditional four, or five, and the subject matter to fit these groups was organized into three cycles of X, Y and Z years instead of the years designated as odd and even. One group consisted of the

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<sup>43</sup> *Kate V. Wofford* : op. cit., pp. 83-4.

primary grades I, II, and III and was designated as Group C : a second grouping was accomplished by a combination of the intermediate grades IV and V into Group B ; and the upper grades VI, VII and VIII were combined into Group A. By such an organization the eight grades were thus reduced to three groups which fall easily into the framework of a daily program.

“Ordinarily, under this plan, each group of pupils completes the work in three years and with the completion of the three groups is ready for entrance into the first year of a high school in the eight-four plan, and, with slight adjustments, the six-three-three system. However, the plan provides richly for individual differences. Indeed, one of its strongest features is its flexibility. Highly superior children can complete the course in six or seven years instead of nine, while slow ones can pass from group to group at a slower rate of speed.”<sup>44</sup>

Several other experiments on such lines are also reported, but they need not be described here. The illustrations given above will show the fundamental features of such plans. They are all based on the principle that the “grade” is not an irreducible unit. They all regroup children suitably in three, **four or five classes and remake the curriculum to suit this arrangement**, thereby overcoming the three great inherent difficulties of the single-teacher school, viz., large numbers of grades to be taught, the small number of children in each grade, and wide differences represented by the total group of children in age, experience, and interests.

The increase in the number of subjects to be taught was the second reason for increasing the difficulties of the solitary rural teacher. Attempts were also made, therefore, to combine subjects in lieu of (or even in addition to) the combination of grades. The old idea of a watertight division between one subject and another is fast disappearing in modern education and even in schools where one grade is in one teacher’s charge, an attempt is being made to teach the different subjects in a correlated manner and to weave all teaching round a few ‘centres of interest’ rather than spread them over a large number of ‘subjects’. Such combination and correlation of subject matter becomes extremely helpful in single-teacher schools and is, therefore, being increasingly adopted in the American small schools. Reinoehl, for instance, found 47 different combinations of two or more subjects in an examination of 26 model programs.<sup>45</sup> The combinations most often used include Geography, History, and Civics, designated as the *Social Studies* ; Reading and Spelling ; Reading, English, and Spelling ; Reading and History. Composition is often correlated with Geography and History, or sometimes with Reading. Accord-

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<sup>44</sup>Kate V. Wofford : op. cit., pp. 84-6.

<sup>45</sup>Reinoehl, C.M. : Analytical survey of State Courses of study for Elementary Schools.

ing to Wofford, the method is not only desirable to make the task of the teacher lighter, but is helpful to the pupil as it economises learning.<sup>46</sup> As there is hardly any limit to the number of ways in which the different subjects in the curriculum can be combined, this idea opens out an almost endless field for fruitful research and experimentation in the quest for making the instruction in the single-teacher school more effective.

There is one more thing that we might learn from America. Based on the innumerable studies and researches carried out by teacher-training institutions, university departments of education and other agencies, the State has produced voluminous literature meant directly for the teacher working in small schools. The existence of this material combined with special preparation courses makes the American teacher better equipped to deal with his task than the worker in a small rural school in any other part of the world. A country like India, therefore, which has a persistent problem of innumerable single-teacher schools to face, cannot but follow this useful precedent.

### **Australia**

Another country whose experience in rural education will be of great use to us is Australia. Here the distribution of population is rather peculiar. The capital of each of the six Australian States houses about half the population of the entire State, and the remainder is spread very sparsely over the whole area of the mofussil. Australia, therefore, has a very large number of single-teacher schools. As in U.S.A. it may be said that the typical rural school in Australia is also a single-teacher institution.

It is interesting to note that Australia has never condemned single-teacher schools. It has either accepted them without question or even grown eloquent about their advantages. The following passage by Mr. F. Tate, Retired Director of Education in Victoria, forms a strong contrast to the remarks of the Royal Commission on Agriculture or the Hartog Committee :

“The one-teacher school in which several grades are taught is in some countries regarded as at best a somewhat unsatisfactory arrangement, to be abandoned as soon as circumstances allow. I found this belief held strongly in Southern Rhodesia and in parts of South Africa. It is apparent, too, in the writings of several American educationists. Australian administrators, however, do not generally accept this opinion. They claim that teachers specially trained for work in such schools can and do secure excellent results; and that pupils trained to work under guidance and being of necessity forced to rely to some extent on their own initiative, may receive a training superior to that of the members of a large class taught by col-

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<sup>46</sup>Kate V. Wofford : op. cit., p. 91.

lective methods.<sup>47</sup> Neither teachers nor parents regard enrolment in these rural schools as a 'grievous handicap' to the children; rather do they regard it as a privilege to be sought and competed for. I may mention that when I was in charge of the Education Department of Victoria I deliberately chose to send my own four children to one-teacher schools associated with training schools, although this entailed a longer journey for them, for I was satisfied with the organization and methods employed by the teachers of these schools."<sup>48</sup>

Mr. Tate has also put forward a very interesting thesis regarding the status of the single-teacher school. He refuses to believe that single-teacher schools are unpopular because they are in a low state of efficiency. On the contrary, he feels that "the low esteem in which the small rural school is held in some countries is due undoubtedly to the less favourable treatment which it has received from the community it serves."<sup>49</sup> After all, it appears that the people get the schools they deserve and that it is our neglect of rural life in general and rural education in particular which is mainly responsible for the low efficiency of our single-teacher schools.

Among the teaching methods used in the single-teacher schools of Australia, it is a pleasant surprise to find that the monitorial system is still popular with a large number of Australian teachers. "In the one-teacher school", writes Mr. H. T. Parker, Psychologist and Supervisor of Research to the Department of Education, Tasmania, "pupil monitors are almost essential. They are usually selected from the upper grades, and deputed to supervise certain activities, not only in reading, but in a number of other subjects. What they lose in instruction by absence from their own grades, they more than make up in the

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<sup>47</sup> In this connection, attention is invited to the following illustration given by Mr. Tate:—

"An interesting sidelight upon the efficiency in one-teacher schools was revealed in one Australian Education Department recently when it was discovered that some thirty inspectors of schools, all University graduates, every one of them had received his elementary education in a small rural school. These inspectors were all men who had risen above the ranks of their fellow-teachers. Making due allowance for the fact that, as a rule, the percentage of recruitment to the teaching service is greater in the country than in the city it would appear that there was surely some permanent residuum from the rural school training which had produced the interest in and the habit of study, the ability to obtain knowledge from the printed page, and a developed self-reliance". (*The Rural School in Australia*, pp. 87-8).

<sup>48</sup> P. R. Cole : *The Rural School in Australia*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>49</sup> P. R. Cole : *op. cit.*, p. 88.

development of a greater sense of responsibility. Further, the prestige of monitorship may be an incentive to greater effort on the part of such children."<sup>50</sup> This does not mean that the use of pupil-monitors is universal and is accepted by all teachers. There is a section which still objects to it. But on the whole, the system is still in vogue and popular.

A detailed account of the use of Monitors in Victoria is given in a later section. It will be seen from this that the system is largely in use even today. Historically, it may be said that the system travelled from its birth-place, India, to Australia, *via* England. It rendered, and is still rendering, a useful service to the cause of Australian rural education while India herself has been made to abandon it altogether!

Another interesting Australian practice which we might advantageously copy in India is the emphasis placed on giving teachers under training a real insight into the working of single-teacher schools. Every Australian teacher is required, while under training, to practise in rural school management. For this purpose, one or more single-teacher schools are attached to every training college. When the college is located in an urban area, an artificial single-teacher school is created for practice purposes by putting together permanently a heterogeneous group of pupils from the neighbourhood. The Teachers' College in Melbourne, for example, maintains "several groups of pupils of large schools who work permanently as a one-teacher school."<sup>51</sup> Experiments of this type are hardly ever done in our training institutions.

Regarding the difficulty of handling several classes simultaneously, the Australian teacher is a little better off than the American, because he has to handle six or seven grades as against eight in U.S.A. He has, however, an equally difficult and wide curriculum to teach. By adopting the same methods as the American teachers do, *i.e.*, by grouping together grades and subjects, he generally contrives to discharge his duties satisfactorily. "In Tasmania", writes Mr. H. T. Parker, "they (*i.e.* grades) range from Grade I to Grade VI, Grade I being often divided into lower and upper sections, making seven grades in all. The position is, roughly, similar in the other States of the Commonwealth. The provision of separate instruction in a number of subjects for each of these grades is no simple task. The uninitiated visitor wonders how it can be done. That it is done, and done well, many hundreds of successfully-conducted schools throughout the country testify."<sup>52</sup>

The different methods of grouping the grades and subjects usually adopted in Australia need not be discussed here in detail, because they are similar to those adopted in U.S.A.

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<sup>50</sup>P. R. Cole, p. 126.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid* : op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid* : op. cit., pp. 124-5.

which have already been noted. But mention must be made here of an interesting method under which the grades are grouped differently for different subjects. This may really be described as the method of *plural-class teaching*. For instance, it will be possible to group together one set of grades for Reading, another set for History, a third for Nature-Study and so on. This sort of plural-class teaching is in a way more advantageous than a permanent grouping of certain grades for all subjects.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, it is interesting to note that the American movement for consolidation of schools does not find much favour in Australia, at least for the time being. As Mr. Tate points out, "the system has made little headway, even in settled districts supplied with good roads. For the past 50 years there has been provision for paying travelling allowances to the nearest school for children living remote from the school, but Australian parents have never taken kindly to any proposals to close their local one-teacher schools in favour of a large central school. The fact that these small schools have developed a very efficient organization and method and are well staffed, is undoubtedly one potent reason why parents oppose any change. Moreover, as they are not taxed locally for the support of their school, they are not immediately concerned with possible economies to be effected in State expenditure by school consolidation. What they do see clearly is that their children must in consequence travel several miles a day in all weathers. Apart from local patriotism, satisfaction with the local school is, perhaps, the strongest factor in opposition to any proposals to consolidate schools. Another important consideration is that in some Australian States the staff of the larger schools carries a proportion of student-teachers, and a prudent parent may well argue that his children may be better off in the small local school under a capable trained teacher than in the larger organization with a mixed staff of teachers."<sup>54</sup>

It is true that there are some indications to show that the consolidation idea might come into greater vogue in future. "Large numbers of children", continues Mr. Parker, "are now being conveyed to district secondary schools, and it is probably only a matter of time before rural primary education will be included within a similar organization."<sup>55</sup> But this is yet to be. In the meanwhile, the one lesson we can undoubtedly infer from the Australian experience is that the need for consolidation is greatly lessened if single-teacher schools can be made efficient. In a poor country like India which cannot afford to adopt the consolidation plan on financial grounds, this is an experience that is too valuable to be ignored.

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<sup>53</sup>For a description of some of the Australian practices in respect of plural-class teaching, see pp. *infra*.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid*, p. 85.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid*.

## Sweden

Sweden is another essentially rural country. Two-thirds of its population lives in villages and, in several areas, the population is very sparsely settled. Like U.S.A. and Australia, therefore, Sweden also has to maintain a large number of single-teacher schools. In the course of years it has tried several experiments and evolved several types of single-teacher schools. Some idea of their functioning can be had from the following description of the different types of Swedish rural schools given by Miss. I. E. Schatzmann :—

A schools—have one teacher for each of the six or seven grades.

B-1 schools—have *three* teachers in all; one for the first and second grades; one for the third and fourth grades; and one for the fifth and sixth grades. All three teachers live in or next to the school.

B-2 schools—have *one* teacher for all grades, but first grade children are admitted only every second year in order that the teacher may not have an overcrowded room.

B-3 schools—have *one* teacher for all grades, but the children are admitted only every other year to the first grade; hence the teacher instructs the first, third, and fifth grades one year and the second, fourth and sixth grades the following year. In cases where some pupils are not ready for promotion the teacher may have four or five grades to teach concurrently; apparently this does not upset the system.

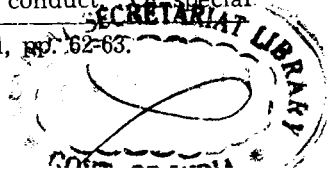
C-1 schools—have one teacher, but two sessions if number of pupils is too large to be accommodated in one room. The older pupils come to the morning session and the little ones to the afternoon session.

C-2 schools—have one teacher, but two sessions for the same reason as in C-1 schools. The pupils alternate in a different way, however. The first group goes to school on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and the second group on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

D-1 schools—have *one* teacher only, who instructs the first and second grades during the first two months of the school year and again during the last two months. During the intervening time these pupils have to come to school each Saturday for review. The other four grades receive instruction during the whole week throughout the school year.”<sup>55</sup>

It will be seen that Sweden has evolved a number of interesting methods to reduce the number of classes that a solitary teacher in charge of a rural school has to conduct. Of special

<sup>55</sup>I. E. Schatzmann : The Country School, pp. 62-63.



interest to us is the use of the shift system. The practice of admitting fresh pupils every alternate year, if used with the American method of combining grades, will obviate the necessity of depromoting pupils to lower grades that arises in the case of pupils admitted in certain years.

Other nations which have done good work on the problem and the results of whose studies have been published are Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand. Some work on it must also have been done in Asian countries like Turkey or China where the problem is more or less acute. Unfortunately, its results are not available in published form. But as these countries have an environment closer to ours, their experiments would naturally have a greater meaning for our administration. It is a pity that, throughout the past, we have followed England as the only model. The problems of rural education in general and of single-teacher schools in particular have, therefore, been ignored because they have not much significance in an urban country like the United Kingdom. Now that the ties which linked us exclusively to England are broken, we must cultivate wider international contacts and seek our models in every part of the globe. If this is done and we closely study what countries like U.S.A., Australia, or Sweden are doing to improve their single-teacher schools, the first steps in raising the quality of instruction in our small rural schools will have been taken.



## CHAPTER III

### Administrative Problems

With this historical and comparative background in view, it will now be possible to discuss some of the more important problems that face single-teacher schools in India. These may be broadly divided into two groups—administrative and pedagogic. Under the first group come six major problems, viz., (1) reduction in numbers; (2) postings and transfers of teachers; (3) grant of leave to teachers and appointment of substitutes in the leave vacancies thus caused; (4) organization of special preparation courses for teachers; (5) restrictions on the admission of fresh pupils; and (6) supervision. Some suggestions on each of these problems have been serially offered in this section.

#### Reduction in numbers

Whether one accepts the American view that the single-teacher school is a necessary evil or the Australian view that it is an integral part of school organisation which has its good as well as bad features, there will be general agreement on the statement that the number of single-teacher schools should be kept as low as possible. Some methods to achieve this end are suggested below.

(a) *Single-teacher Schools in Urban Areas and Big Villages* : It would be a mistake to suppose that single-teacher schools are found only in small villages. One comes across them in big villages, in towns, and even in cities. In all these areas the population is sufficiently large to establish only multi-teacher schools. For example, as many as 75 children can be enrolled in a school situated in a village with a population of 500 or thereabouts and it would be economically possible to appoint two teachers for such a school. Hence, all places with a population of more than 500 should ordinarily have no single-teacher school of any type. But we do have them even in the City of Bombay which has a population of about 30 lakhs.

One of the factors which are responsible for the existence of such schools is language. It may be that the total population of the place is 2,000. But the number of Muslim families therein may be only 30 or 40 and if they want instruction for their children through Urdu, they will have to be provided (or they will provide themselves) with a special school teaching through Urdu. This will, under the circumstances stated, be a single-teacher school only. Similarly, in all bi-lingual areas, there will be small groups of people who speak a language different from that of the region and who would like to conduct a special school in order to educate their children through their mother-tongue. Such a school has a legitimate claim to exist and is entitled to receive grants from public funds. Even if it is only a single-teacher institution, it should be allowed to function.

But single-teacher schools often come into existence in bigger places on grounds which are not always so justifiable. Take, for instance, the case of private schools. One very often comes across a private single-teacher school—usually a proprietary concern—started in some locality of a big place.<sup>57</sup> It is ordinarily conducted by a person who has become a teacher by profession and who, by individual efforts succeeds in persuading several parents to send their children to his private school in preference to the public school in the locality. While it is necessary to encourage private enterprise in this field, the State would be justified in making a rule to the effect that no recognition would be granted to any private single-teacher school *teaching more than two classes* in a place where the total population is big enough to justify the exclusive establishment of multi-teacher schools.<sup>58</sup> Such a rule would not prevent any individual from conducting a private school; but it would compel him either to take an assistant (if he wants to teach the full course of the junior primary stage) or to restrict his school to two classes only. In both cases, the efficiency of instruction would be improved without endangering the growth of private enterprise.

Another common cause which leads to the establishment of single-teacher schools in urban or semi-urban places is the absence of co-education. Since girls' schools are kept apart from boys' schools, and the enrolment of girls is proportionately less than that of boys, one often comes across hundreds of places which have a multi-teacher boys' school and a single-teacher girls' school. The adoption of co-education would put an end to all single-teacher girls' schools in such places. Separate schools for girls were started about a hundred years ago when the public had a great prejudice against the education of girls and an even greater prejudice against their education with the boys. Social conditions have greatly changed since then. The prejudice against the education of girls is almost dead; and that against co-education at the primary stage is no longer seen in urban centres and is dying out very fast even in rural areas. The time has, therefore, arrived to adopt co-education as *the* policy at the primary stage. Travancore has already introduced this reform and found it very advantageous.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Statistics of single-teacher schools in urban areas are not published; but every inspecting officer must have come across them in numbers. I found, in 1941, 86 private schools in Kolhapur City (Population was nearly a lakh in total) of which as many as 40 were single-teacher institutions teaching at least five and sometimes all the eight classes of the primary course.

<sup>58</sup> Roughly speaking, all places with a population of 1,000 or more would come into this category. The rule may further be generalised by saying that the school must maintain at least one teacher for every two classes recognised.

<sup>59</sup> Primary Education in Travancore, Teaching, Vol. XIV, p. 125.

Bombay City has followed suit since 1950-51 and given the right approach and educative propaganda. It should be possible to introduce co-education in all our primary schools and also to appoint mixed staffs in a fairly large number of them. This reform would probably have a very far-reaching effect in reducing the number of single-teacher schools. It will, of course, have several other important advantages as well and one feels that it ought to be accorded a very high priority in our programme of educational reconstruction.

Still another cause that leads to the creation of single-teacher schools is the absence of compulsion. This happens especially in villages with a population between 500 and 1,000. When attendance is voluntary, such a village usually has an enrolment of 30 to 50 in the local school and ordinarily only one teacher is appointed to conduct it. Under compulsion, attendance will rise to 15 or at least  $12\frac{1}{2}$  p.c. of the population, and hence all such villages will have an attendance of 70 or more children and can be given two or more teachers. The universal introduction of compulsion, therefore, is the surest and the most effective way to reduce the number of single-teacher schools in these areas.

If the three proposals made here are adopted, single-teacher schools with more than two classes will cease to exist in cities, towns, and all villages with a population of 500 or more, with the one exception of schools teaching through the language of a small minority group. This indeed would be a great achievement because, though the number of such places is comparatively small, they account for about 80 p.c. of the total population of the country.

(b) *Single-teacher schools in villages with a population of less than 500* :—Coming to villages with a population of less than 500, it may be stated that they will, as a rule, have single-teacher schools only.<sup>60</sup>

It is in these small villages that the plan of the "consolidated school" was tried in India at the instance of the Hartog Report. The idea was to establish a central school (with at least two teachers) in a selected village and then to expect the children of the small neighbouring villages (which could not be given a two-teacher school) to walk up to it every day for instruction. In actual practice, however, the plan did not work for the simple reason that no arrangement for the transport of

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<sup>60</sup>In villages with a population of 400 or more, the enrolment of children will be 60 or more if compulsion is fully enforced. But this may not be possible for some years to come. Moreover, even if the attendance is about 60, it may not be always financially possible to appoint a second teacher and the work will have to be done by a single-teacher working under the shift system. It would, therefore, be safer to assume that all villages with a population of less than 500 would have single-teacher schools only.

children was made. In America, where the plan was tried on a fairly large scale, the arrangement of transport for *all* children was a condition precedent to its adoption. The Indian administrators of education adopted the same plan; but they excluded the costly (and, in our conditions, the practically impossible) item of school transport, and expected the children of the neighbouring villages to walk to the school. This might have been possible if the village adults were educated and alive to the importance of education. But in our present conditions parents do not desire to send their children to schools nor are the children themselves eager to attend them. Consequently, the consolidated school plan of U.S.A. did not work in India, especially when the idea of transporting children was left out.

A modified form of the consolidated school plan is the scheme of Branch schools invented by the Punjab State and recommended both by the Royal Commission on Agriculture and the Hartog Committee. The fundamental step in the plan is to select a conveniently situated village and to establish a central or suzerain school in it and to open branches in neighbouring villages. The central school is necessarily a multi-teacher school; but the branch school is a single-teacher institution and teaches only the two lower standards. Under this plan several advantages are secured simultaneously. The very young children are not required to walk long distances to reach the central school and can study for some time in their own village (It is expected that grown-up boys and girls would attend the central school without inconvenience). Secondly, the teachers of single-teacher schools have to handle only two classes at a time and can, therefore, maintain a higher level of efficiency; and thirdly, the branch schools are not regarded as independent units but merely as parts of the central school and are placed directly under its control. Therefore, the constant supervision of the central school helps materially in maintaining the tone of the single-teacher branches.

As against these advantages, the proposal is objected to on the main ground that it creates a large number of *incomplete schools* i.e., schools which provide a course whose duration is shorter than four years. It is common knowledge that such schools do not impart permanent literacy and that those of its students who do not pursue their studies elsewhere (generally they do not) are very likely to forget the little they learned in their early years. A drive to eliminate the incomplete schools is also recommended as a method of reducing waste and it appears that, under the plan of branch schools, we fall into one evil—and that a more serious one—while avoiding another. The remedy, therefore, seems to be worse than the disease.

The Punjab gave this experiment a very generous trial. The Hartog Committee proudly pointed out that the Punjab had as many as 2,707 schools of this type.<sup>61</sup> But the experiment did

not succeed and had ultimately to be given up.<sup>62</sup> The enthusiasm with which the Hartog Committee recommended this idea, therefore, is no longer shared and it would be wrong to rely on it as a method of eliminating single-teacher schools.

Probably, the only useful application of the plan would be to provide upper primary education to small villages. It may not be possible to create facilities for teaching the full primary course (which would require a school with two or preferably, three teachers) in *all* villages for a very long time to come. The expansion drive for the next few years, therefore, should aim at providing a school teaching the junior primary course (of four or five years as the case may be) in every village; and facilities for the upper primary course of three years should be provided at central schools located in carefully selected villages in such a manner that a school teaching the upper primary standards would be available within about three miles of every village. Under such a system, every primary school would teach the junior primary course in full and impart permanent literacy, while "consolidation" would be tried for the upper primary stage only.<sup>63</sup> We might even go a step further and regard such full-grade primary school as the Central School and give it some control over the neighbouring schools teaching the junior course, which may be considered as its branches. Barring this useful but limited application which is rather beside the point in considering the problems of single-teacher schools, the branch school idea has nothing to contribute to the solution of the educational problems of rural India.

It is possible to reduce the number of single-teacher schools required for small villages with a population of less than 500 by adopting two devices. The first is the holding of educational surveys. Although these were recommended as early as 1912,<sup>64</sup> very few States have carried them out. They will enable the Department to plan schools properly over the countryside and to eliminate overlapping or superfluous institutions. It is, therefore, desirable that every state should carry out educational surveys of its area as early as possible.

The second device is the radical proposal of some planners to amalgamate the small villages themselves so as to form bigger units with a population of 500 or more. The group of thinkers who advocate this view, point out that each of these small villages wants not only a school teaching the full primary course (and hence having at least two teachers), but a drinking water well, an approach road, medical and veterinary aid

<sup>62</sup>In 1944-45, the latest pre-partition year for which data are available, the number of these schools stood only at 391 (Director of Public Instruction's Report, 1944-45, p. 4).

<sup>63</sup>This is analogous to the Australian practice where every school teaches the full primary course and consolidation is adopted for the secondary stage only.

<sup>64</sup>Quinquennial Review of the Progress of Education in India, 1907-12, Vol. I, pp.....

police protection, etc. If the recurring and non-recurring cost of providing all these amenities on an adequate scale is worked out, they find that the financial implications are exorbitant and that it would be *cheaper* to lift up some small villages from their present location and to amalgamate them with others by constructing all the additional houses required at State cost.

This is a rational but a very radical approach ; and like all attempts at oversimplification, it will not be carried out for several years to come. In the meanwhile, the educationist must take realistic steps along three lines to meet the educational needs of the small villages whose population is less than 500 : (1) He should hold educational surveys and decide the number and location of *all* primary schools required to meet the needs of every village, but planned in such a manner as to avoid all overlapping ; (2) he should locate a single-teacher school teaching the full junior course at every centre indicated in the survey ; and (3) at a few selected centres which will be within three miles of every village, he should establish a full-grade primary school. (This will have a staff of not less than two teachers irrespective of the number of pupils). Even this three-fold programme will be work enough for the next ten years.

### **Postings and Transfers of Teachers**

Another important administrative problem is the postings and transfers of teachers to these small rural schools. It is generally agreed in theory that, the work of a single-teacher school is, in several ways, more difficult than that in a multi-teacher school. It is, therefore, essential to place the former under trained, capable and conscientious teachers. But in practice, this does not ordinarily happen. The single-teacher schools are generally situated in small scattered villages which are difficult of access and where amenities of life like a bazar, post-office, good drinking water and medical aid are often not available. Teachers are, therefore, generally unwilling to serve in these schools. Moreover, the number of trained, capable and conscientious teachers is small and the bigger full-fledged primary schools have a prior claim on them. Consequently, it is usually the untrained and the junior teacher that happens to be posted to a single-teacher school ; and very often, a recalcitrant teacher is transferred to it as a form of punishment. Under these conditions, it is hardly a matter for surprise if the quality of work turned out in single-teacher schools is generally poor.

The real solution to the problem is to increase the percentage of trained teachers to the maximum. State Governments should accept the principle that no primary teacher should be confirmed in service until he is trained ; and they should take steps so to increase the number of training institutions that every new recruit to the cadre of primary teachers would either have been trained already or can be sent in for training within

three to four years from the date of his appointment. If this reform is carried out and if the recruitment to the cadre is carefully made—this may involve a radical alteration in our present system of recruiting primary teachers and some reduction in the powers of local bodies in the matter—it will be possible to place single-teacher schools mostly under trained and capable teachers. In the meanwhile, the administering authorities should try to make the best of a bad situation and see that single-teacher schools are placed, as far as possible, under the charge of trained, or at least, conscientious teachers. Where it is not possible to do so for some reason the deficiency may be made up, to some extent at least, by arranging short refresher courses or by providing a closer supervision over the work of the teachers.

Two useful suggestions can be made in this context. The first is based on the analogy of a rule which already obtains in railway service. The climate of some of the railway stations is so bad that hardly any person is willing to go there as a Station Master. A rule is, therefore, laid down that every Station Master must put in a minimum specified service (usually of two years or so) at such bad climate stations. This is a practicable joint-family method of making every member of the cadre share a necessary evil and it works quite well in practice. We might, on a similar basis, lay it down that every trained teacher must put in three or five years' service in a single-teacher school. This will eliminate a good deal of heart-burning that is now caused when a trained teacher is transferred to a single-teacher school and it will also obviate the necessity of keeping some trained but unwilling teachers indefinitely posted to single-teacher schools. This is admittedly a provisional device; but it will be useful at this stage when only about half the teachers are trained.<sup>65</sup> The second suggestion is that transfers should not be regarded as a form of punishment. A recalcitrant teacher needs better supervision and he may be less harmful as an assistant in a multi-teacher school, than as the sole boss of a single-teacher school. He might be punished in any manner for his recalcitrance—by censure, fine, reduction in pay, or even dismissal; but the practice of transferring him to a single-teacher school at an out-of-the-way place should never be adopted.

### Grant of Leave

The problem of leave becomes particularly acute in single-teacher schools. In a multi-teacher school, even if one or two teachers go on leave, the work of the absentees is distributed between the other members of the staff and the school is not required to be closed. But in a single-teacher school, if the

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In Australia, there is a rule that every primary teacher must serve for some time in rural areas, which generally means in a single-teacher school. Teachers do protest and, officials, though not always unfeeling, are adamant in the application of the rule, vide *P.R. Cole*, op. cit., p. 10.

teacher goes on leave, the institution just comes to a standstill. A detailed scheme for the grant of leave to the teachers in charge of these small schools and for the appointment of substitutes in the leave vacancies so caused has, therefore, to be worked out for the use of administration.

The general procedure on the subject appears to be somewhat like this : casual leave to the teacher is sanctioned by the Chairman of the local school committee ; and other kinds of leave are sanctioned by a higher official—generally the Chief Executive Officer of the School Board or Committee employing him—who can also appoint a substitute to take charge of the school in the leave vacancy. In practice, however, these arrangements break down very often. In several places, there is no local school committee at all ; or even if there is one, it does not function satisfactorily. In such instances, the teacher is a law unto himself. A common trick practised by an unscrupulous teacher is to write a report saying that he has to proceed on leave on account of unavoidable circumstances, to leave it in the school, and then to go away on an “unofficial leave”. If any officer turns up in his absence, he is shown the report. If no one does, the teacher tears out the report on return and fills in a bogus attendance as if he was on duty.

The best way to avoid such irregularities is to set up an active school committee or at least to have an active chairman. But this is not always possible. And even if it were, it would only legalise the teacher's absence. It would not be possible for the controlling authorities to appoint a substitute when the teacher is on casual leave and in all such cases, therefore, the school would perforce have to be closed. The monitorial system, if adopted, can solve the problem to some extent ; in the short absence of the teacher, the monitors can be expected to run the school in a manner which would certainly be better than keeping it closed. But we have abandoned the system once and cannot see our way to readopt it. In this particular instance, however, it must be noted that the monitorial system is the *only* possible solution to the problem.

A still greater difficulty is caused when the teacher has to proceed on long leave with short or no notice. It is true that teachers are required to express their intention of going on long leave well in advance ; but this is not always done and sometimes it is not even possible. When such an emergency arises, great delays are caused in appointing a substitute because the official making the appointment has to follow a prescribed procedure. Some time is lost before the news of the teacher's absence reaches headquarters ; then the office red-tape must take its time and sooner or later an order of appointment is issued to a candidate from the approved list. Some more time is lost before the candidate gets the order and joins his post. Sometimes he chooses not to join ; then the order has to be sent to another candidate ; and so on until somebody turns up at the school. Not infrequently, the leave expires and the



teacher himself joins up at the school before any substitute can do so. And all this while the school remains closed for lack of a teacher.

It must be made clear that the evil is not imaginary but real. A pilot survey carried out for one year in six districts of Bombay State showed that more than 10 p.c. of the single-teacher schools had remained closed at some time or the other because the teacher went on leave and a substitute was not appointed in time; that no substitute was generally appointed (or could be appointed) if the duration of the leave was less than 30 days; and that several schools had remained closed for longer than a month owing to difficulties of the type mentioned above. The situation has, therefore, to be taken note of and remedied.

One proposal, made after a careful statistical investigation carried out in Bombay State, is this: The single-teacher schools in a district should be divided into convenient groups of 18 to 25. A big primary school central to this group should be selected as the controlling school and an extra relieving teacher should be attached thereto. Whenever a teacher of a single-teacher school proceeds on leave of more than seven days' duration, he informs the headmaster of the controlling school who at once sends the relieving teacher to take charge of the school and then sends the papers to the headquarters for formal orders. Under this arrangement, the chances of a single-teacher school remaining closed are reduced to the minimum and prompt action in sending a substitute is made possible. The only drawback is that it needs a reserve of relieving teachers at five per cent. of the total number of single-teacher schools. The financial implications of this proposal are rather formidable and it does not have much chance of being accepted by State Governments in the present conditions of financial stringency.

Shri S. R. Tawde, a retired Educational Inspector, in the Bombay State, has tried an interesting experiment to meet this difficulty without involving additional expenditure. He grouped all schools within a radius of five or six miles into one unit, and placed them under the direct control of the Headmaster of a conveniently selected central school. Whenever the teacher in charge of a single-teacher school in the group desired to go on leave, he was required to get the permission of this Headmaster. He could easily do so because he lived within a convenient distance of the controlling school. If the duration of the leave exceeded seven days, the Headmaster immediately sent one of his assistants to conduct the single-teacher school. The central school was short of one teacher: but as it was a multi-teacher school, the work could somehow be managed. As soon as a substitute was appointed by the Head Office and joined duties, the teacher of the central school resumed his own post. In this plan, all the extra financial burden involved in the former proposal is avoided and the

work of the single-teacher school is kept going by shifting the inconvenience to a neighbouring multi-teacher school which can overcome it more easily. The plan also makes it possible to control the teachers of single-teacher schools when no efficient local school committee can be set up to supervise its work. The experiment is really full of potentialities and deserves wide recognition and publicity.

### **Training of Teachers**

Whether the teachers of these small rural schools need any special training for their job is another issue that arises in this context. Unfortunately, the problem has so far received scant attention in India. Most of our training colleges for primary teachers are situated in urban areas, and hence the trainees never get an opportunity to see a model single-teacher school in action or to practise in it. Moreover, method of training usually adopted in these colleges is to make the trainee give a number of isolated practice lessons. This is suitable for a multi-teacher school where a teacher is in charge of one class at a time or where the teaching is arranged subjectwise, but is of hardly any use in a single-teacher school. The special methods required to be adopted in a single-teacher school are not at all included in the curricula of training institutions of several states, and the subject is totally neglected. In others, the topic is included in the curriculum but its actual teaching often becomes theoretical and unreal and is restricted to a few lectures of a hackneyed type. It would, therefore, be no exaggeration to say that the average teacher who comes out of our training institutions is generally ignorant of the special methods to be adopted in single-teacher schools or is incapable of using them successfully. This is a matter which needs immediate attention.

That the teachers of the small rural schools need special training for their job is a statement which is hardly likely to be disputed at present. The discussion of the problem may, therefore, be confined only to a description of the methods of such training. As a rule, it is attempted in two ways. The first is that of pre-service training. Since fifty per cent of our schools are single-teacher institutions, it is quite probable that more than half of our teachers will have to serve in single-teacher schools for some part of their service. It is, therefore, suggested that the special techniques to be adopted in single-teacher schools should form an integral part of the curriculum of every training institution for primary teachers. Every teacher under training should be required to do continuous practice teaching in a single-teacher school for a period of not less than a week. As far as possible, training colleges should be shifted to rural areas and be provided with actual single-teacher schools for practice purposes; and even when a college is situated in urban areas, one or more specially created single-teacher schools should always be conducted in association with it.

Even these measures will not be enough to meet the requirements of the situation. For the exigencies of administration, several persons who have not been to the training college will have to be posted to single-teacher schools; and even those who have been trained in the past are *not* likely to have received any special training for the purpose. It would, therefore, be necessary to conduct short refresher or training courses for such teachers just before the opening of the school year. The duration of the course should be for 15 days. The first five days should be given to general discussion and lectures. For the next seven days each trainee should be required to do whole-time practice-teaching, under supervision, in a single-teacher school; and the last three days should be spent in gathering threads, comparing notes and summing-up. Every teacher who has been posted to a single-teacher school for the first time should be compelled to attend the course. For trained teachers, one attendance would be enough; but untrained teachers should be required to attend the courses for two or three consecutive years. The organisation of such courses will not be costly and their returns in terms of improving the efficiency of the single-teacher schools cannot be over-estimated.

### **Restrictions on Fresh Admissions**

Fresh admissions to the lowest primary class should be made in the first one or two months of the school year so that the class becomes homogeneous and shows better progress. This rule is essential for all primary schools; but it is not enforced in several large areas even today. As the *Review of Education in India* (1917-22) pointed out, the lowest class thus gets subdivided into a number of further units depending upon the progress of children, and the work of the teacher becomes all the more difficult. Therefore, in the single-teacher schools at any rate, a scrupulous observation of this rule is very essential.

### **Supervision**

The problem of supervision over the single-teacher schools also presents some peculiar difficulties. The first point to be noted is the need of making it adequate. Under the present conditions, an inspecting officer has to manage about 60 or more schools and he can, therefore, see each single-teacher school twice only in the course of a year—once for inspection and once for a visit. This can hardly be regarded as adequate, especially when an untrained teacher is in charge. A better alternative, therefore, is to adopt the central school idea and to make its Headmaster the supervisor of all the single-teacher schools in his charge. He will then be able to visit them once a quarter, and whenever necessary, even to call the teachers to his school for demonstration lessons, discussions, etc. The supervision would thus be closer, better, and even more economical because the allowance to be paid to the Headmaster would be much less than the salary and allowances of the whole-time Inspector. Here is one more reason, therefore, to adopt the scheme of central schools as an integral part of the administration of rural schools.

## CHAPTER IV

### Pedagogic Problems

In the previous chapter some of the administrative problems facing the single-teacher schools were discussed and suggestions for solving the same made. The present chapter is devoted to the consideration of another group of problems which may be characterised as 'Pedagogic'. These will arise from two fundamental issues : the classification of the pupils into *grades* and the division of the curriculum into *subjects*. The solitary primary teacher in India has to manage four or five grades at a time and each grade has to be instructed in about eight or nine subjects. This is, of course, a difficult task, but certainly not impossible as our administrators under the dyarchy wanted us to believe. As we have seen, single teachers in charge of small rural schools in other countries have to perform a more difficult task *viz.*, to manage seven or eight grades at a time and to teach a syllabus which is even more extensive than ours. If that job can be done well, it ought to be all the more possible for our teachers to manage four or five grades at a time and to teach a less ambitious syllabus. All that we need is a new approach to the problem in the light of the experience gained abroad.

#### Combination of Grades

Of the different suggestions that can be put forward to lighten the burden of the solitary teacher by reducing the number of grades he is required to teach, the simplest would be the combination of grades so commonly adopted in U.S.A. Where the total number of grades to be taught is five, grade I should be left as it is ; grade II should be combined with grade III ; and grade IV with grade V. Thus the total number of *classes* that a teacher would have to manage will be three instead of five. If there are only four grades to be taught, grades I and II should be combined together and so also grades III and IV. Thus, the teacher will have to manage only two classes at a time. Fresh students may either be admitted every year and alternated in the combined grades on the American model ; or the Swedish model may be adopted and fresh admission may be made in every alternate year only.<sup>66</sup>

Although every consideration is in favour of such a proposal, several administrators, teachers and parents react unfavourably to the idea and are unwilling to accept it as a general '*modus operandi*' in our rural schools. This is not surprising.

In this case, the combinations for a five-grade school would be : grades I and II ; grades III and IV ; and grade V. The highest grade will not exist in alternate years. The teacher will thus have three different *classes* in one year and only two in the next.

Most of our educators are urban in habit and outlook. Their idea of rural uplift is to make villages into "lesser towns", and they feel that the classification of pupils into grades which has been good for education in the cities must also be good for rural education. It is necessary, therefore, to examine the pros and cons of the proposal in some detail.

For this purpose, a study of the controversies that once raged in U.S.A. will be helpful. It must be remembered that, even in America, the plans to combine and alternate grades were not readily accepted. Of the various objections raised, two only are important and may be mentioned here. The first is the administrative objection regarding the transfer and promotion of pupils *i.e.*, the difficulties that might arise when the pupils of such schools are transferred, during the course, to an urban or rural school where the usual grades are followed. The objection is particularly valid in areas where migration to urban localities is very large. Detailed statistical investigations, however, show that the difficulty is not so serious as some opponents make it out to be. Miss Heyl, State Supervisor of Rural Schools, Albany, New York, for example, found that transfers in rural areas tended towards schools of the same size and type and, therefore, felt that the problem was a local matter to be decided in the light of local conditions.<sup>67</sup> This objection, therefore, is not entertained very seriously and has lost its ground. Many schools are already making the necessary adjustments through objective tests, and each transfer and placement is regarded as an individual matter to be decided on its own merits.

The second, and a far stronger criticism, comes from the conservative educationists who believe the "grade" to be so sacrosanct as to be regarded almost as a law of nature. They find it difficult to digest such steps as the child makes from Grade VI to Grade VIII in one year and thence to Grade VII in the next, and argue that such antics interfere with the child's development.

Fannie Dunn has met this criticism by pointing out that the organization of subject-matter as this has been set up to fit conditions in elementary schools is not the only one possible. History courses, for instances, can choose an arbitrary point of departure—Romulus and Remus or the Discovery of America—and can deal with subjects chosen chronologically or otherwise. Similarly, mathematical processes can be shuffled and Fractions taught before Long Division.

Even this objection, therefore, lost its ground educationally. People soon began to realise that the organisation of the curriculum into eight grades was merely an arrangement to suit a particular situation and that there is no objection to abandon it if different set of circumstances demanded such a reform.

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<sup>67</sup>Kate V. Wofford : *op. cit.*, p. 90.

It is also interesting to note that a study of the historical aspect of the problem revealed a surprising phenomenon. It appears that the system of "grading" pupils was introduced into single-teacher schools from urban precedents with the original object of *reducing* the work of the teacher; but that, contrary to all expectations, resulted only in *increasing* his work to a point of impossibility.

Miss Wofford's '*Teaching in Small Schools*' records interesting experiences in this connection. It was a common practice in the eighteen nineties for children to find their places in the school organisation by reading ability, and if asked in what class they were, would reply: "I am in the III Reader" or "I am in the V Reader". Teachers taught from early in the morning till late in the evening, but had not heard all the recitations. A uniform system of text-books and grading was adopted in both urban and rural schools.

While the grading system was reasonably well suited to the need to group large numbers of children in urban schools it was a failure from the start in rural schools. Said W. T. Harris: "In my opinion there is no worse evil in the country school than the classification of pupils which is attempted in many States under the supposition that what is proved a good thing in the city would be beneficial..... in the rural districts".

In spite of this and other protests the rural teacher in 1910 found himself teaching in a school graded after the manner of city schools and using courses of study made for urban situations. The grades so planned were for an eight or nine-month school term and for the teacher with from one to two grades. Result: The teacher found himself struggling with a situation as difficult as that prior to the grading of schools. He was teaching a group of children ranging in age from six to 18 years, and in learning from A.B.C. to Caesar. His day became one long succession of hearing lessons and his teaching, a deadly routine. Indeed, problems of organization in the small school had multiplied, not diminished, under the grade system.

A close study of Wofford's book shows that the "grade" was a peculiarly urban concept; that it was a fundamental error to impose grades upon single-teacher schools; that most of the solitary teacher's troubles arose from imposition of "too many grades and too many subjects"; and that the disappearance of the "grade" was to be welcomed rather than opposed. As such ideas gained currency, the programmes of combining grades became more and more acceptable to the teachers and the public. In 1922, Reinoehl found, in an analysis of 44 State Courses of Study, that 73% of them recommended the Combination and Alternation of Grades Plan for small schools.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Kate V. Wofford : p. 83.

The narrative of the American contraversies shows the pros and cons of the proposal very clearly and leads to the conclusion that educationally, it would be a great advantage to the single-teacher schools in India if the number of classes to be taught simultaneously is halved by combination of two consecutive classes into one. The proposal is subject only to the limited administrative objection of the difficulties that would arise when a pupil is transferred, in the middle of the course, to a properly graded school.

### Plural-Class Teaching

Another and a less radical proposal is to adopt plural-class teaching and to keep the grades as they are. This rules out the administrative objection raised against the combination of grades and does not arouse the hostility of the orthodox parent or teacher. But even when the grades are kept intact as in any urban school, it is possible to teach two or more classes simultaneously in certain subjects.

This method of plural-class teaching is well developed in Australia. In *Tasmania* for example, the curriculum of the small rural schools is so arranged that it lends itself to grouping off grades in certain subjects. "Each grade is taken separately in Reading, Spelling, Arithmetic and Needlework, and all grades are taken together for Physical Training, Singing, Scripture and Moral Lessons. There are *two* school groups in Nature Study, Drawing and Manual Work, and *three* school groups in Language Lessons, Poetry, History, Geography and Geometrical Work".<sup>69</sup>

In *South Australia*, "each grade is taken separately in Spelling, Writing, Arithmetic and Manual Work, and all grades are combined for Physical Training, Music, Nature Study, Needlework and Moral Lessons. There are *five* school groups in Reading, *three* in Geography, Language and Poetry, and *two* in Drawing, History and Grammar".<sup>69</sup> In *Victoria*, "each grade is taken separately in Arithmetic and Spelling, and all grades are taken together in Music. There are two school groups in speech training, health and physical training, *three* in Writing, Poetry, Grammar, Nature Study and Science, Hand Work, Domestic Science, and Social Studies, *four* in Composition and Art, and *five* in Reading".<sup>69</sup> In *New South Wales*, "the rural school is divided into *two* sections. Each class in each section works more or less independently in English and Arithmetic. Grades are combined in each section for Nature Knowledge, History, Art, Handwork, Singing, Hygiene and Scripture, and the two sections may be combined for observation and picture talks, physical exercises and moral stories".<sup>69</sup> But in all these States, it is made clear that there is no intention to prescribe rigid grouping schemes. The suggestions made in the official curriculum, which are summarised above, are to be regarded as tentative and modifications to meet local needs are not only permitted but encouraged as well.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>69</sup>P. R. Cole : op. cit., pp. 136-38.

Similar combinations can easily be worked out for India as well. Each state would have to work out the details for itself. It would serve no purpose to leave the work to the primary teachers because they would have neither the vision nor the capacity to do it *at the initial stage*. The lead in the matter must, therefore, come from more competent sources *i.e.*, the research sections of Universities, Education Departments or other organisations working at that level. Once the idea becomes familiar and is brought largely into vogue, some primary teachers will be able to contribute valuable suggestions from their practical experience and to advance the cause. Here is, therefore, a very attractive method which India can easily adopt to improve its single-teacher schools.

### Monitorial System

The third suggestion to improve the teaching in the single-teacher schools is to revive the old system of monitorial teaching. It may not be revived in the same form. In fact, the form is the least important part of the system and any of its form which suit modern conditions could be adopted. This is really our system and is eminently suited to the needs of a poor, rural, and agricultural country like ours. We gave it to the West and it was a grievous administrative error to abandon it under a lead from an urban, industrialised and rich country like England. We must, therefore, readopt it because it has the power to make our single-teacher schools much better than they are at present.

As stated earlier, the system is still in vogue in Australia and the Australian experience of its working is very encouraging. An enquiry into the subject within the States of Victoria and New South Wales was conducted by Messrs. J. M. Braithwaite, Inspector of Schools in New South Wales, and C. R. McRae, Senior Lecturer in Education, Teachers' College, Sydney. They raised two main issues for discussion, *viz.*,

- (1) What is the attitude of teachers towards the system?
- (2) What good or bad effects does it have on the pupils?

On the first issue, they found that the majority of teachers in New South Wales had monitors but that they were used only for such duties as filling ink-wells, decorating the school, cleaning of the play-shed, and giving out text-books and other materials. Only one teacher was enthusiastic about teaching monitors. "Without monitors," he wrote, "the lot of the small-school teacher would be almost unbearable".<sup>70</sup> But the teachers of Victoria were very strongly in support of the system. "Almost all of them", write the investigators, "have nothing but praise for the use of monitors, and even the few who regret the time lost by the child from his own class regard that loss as inevitable. Their opinion is expressed plainly in the three following sentences culled from the batch of returns :

<sup>70</sup> P. R. Cole : *op. cit.*, p. 208.



'It would be impossible to run this type of school without monitors'.

'Their use is an essential aid to the successful organisation of a one-teacher school'.

'Monitors must be used in a one-teacher school in which all the grades are represented'.<sup>71</sup>

On the second issue, too, they found that the monitorial system was good, not only for the teachers but also for the pupils. "No one who has seen one of Victoria's small country schools at work", they continue, "could fail to be impressed by the value of the monitorial system as it is used in that state. It certainly enables the head teacher to do more and better work. Without it, his services would often be spread so thin as to be of little avail. It ensures that the youngest pupils will have, almost constantly, the guidance without which they would waste much time. Best of all, perhaps, it develops in the small school a spirit of co-operation and a feeling of partnership in a well-conducted concern which are rarely to be observed in any other kind of school. To illustrate its value, a few lines from one of our Victorian returns are worth quoting :

'I have seen rural children, aged nine to 14 years, take a keen delight in making wall-charts in their home time for Grades I and II. Children living near the school need to be almost forced to go home in the evening, so enthusiastic are their efforts to prepare aids for their monitorial duties.

'A healthier relationship frequently develops between brothers and sisters from the monitorial system. Older boys and girls learn the superior value of persuasion and sympathy over hectoring and force. The younger ones feel that they can better rely on the judgment of their senior brothers and sisters.

'From the view-point of life-service, of being valuable members of a corporate society, the monitorial system lays foundations as secure as they are essential, on which altruism may safely flourish. From junior to supplementary departments, first as being ministered to and then as ministering, the child feels, gropes his way along. He acquires the virtue of obedience, that will later enable him to command, pleasantly, persuasively, productively. He leaves school realizing that he has contributed to the process of educating a generation.

'And if he is not consciously aware of this, it cannot be denied that he has contributed. His reach has exceeded his grasp : he has done without being aware of doing'.

It will be noted that this teacher writes of his young assistants feelingly, and with enthusiasm. We are of the opinion that he does so on good grounds".<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> P. R. Cole, pp. 204-05.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, op. cit. pp. 207-208.

It will, therefore, be seen that the system is good for the teacher as well as the pupil and no difficulties should, therefore, be allowed to come in the way of its revival in India.

There are various aspects of the monitorial system that need a careful study, *viz.*, selection and training of monitors, determination of the duties to be assigned to them and the manner of supervising their work. Valuable lessons in these matters learnt from the practice of Victoria are given in Appendix A.

### **Time-Table**

Preparation of good time-tables is a frequent headache of the solitary rural teacher. The usual principles of constructing time-tables are so exacting that it is quite a job to prepare a good time-table even for a school which has a teacher for each division. In the case of the solitary teacher, these difficulties are further increased. He has to see that his time is equitably divided between the different grades or classes; that every group is kept fully occupied all the time; that adequate attention is given to every subject; and that the time-table is not upset by the method of plural-class teaching which will very frequently have to be adopted. Moreover, he has not only to indicate what a particular period is but also to state how it would be managed *i.e.* whether the teacher himself would take it, or whether the pupils would be left to work on their own, or whether a monitor would be present. It is, therefore, essential to train the teachers of these small schools to prepare scientific and convenient time-tables. A specimen time-table from an Australian single-teacher school is given in Appendix B.

### **Shift System**

Still another useful device to reduce the number of classes which the teacher of a single-teacher school has to handle at a time is to adopt the shift system. In a scheme where the primary course consists of four classes the adoption of the shift system would mean that the teacher has to handle only two classes at a time—a comparatively simple affair. It would be very interesting to find out whether the children studying under such a plan learn less than those where the teacher teaches all four classes at a time. The chances are that, in so far as the achievements of the pupils are concerned, the two systems would just be equal in results; and the shift system would have the additional advantage of making the task of the teacher lighter. It may be noted that the enrolment in a single-teacher school is bound to vary, according to local circumstances, from 15 or 20 to about 50 or 60. When it is on the high side and anywhere above 30-35, the shift system would be invaluable and perhaps indispensable.

### Individual Instruction

The large variety of new methods of teaching that a teacher in charge of a small rural school can adopt may be inferred from two extreme examples. At one end, he can defy all grades and all subjects and just give individual instruction to each child. This is especially possible when the total enrolment is small, say 15 or 20. In the old indigenous schools, this was the order of the day; and there is no reason why it should not be adopted in some at least of our small single-teacher schools.

### Perpendicular Unit

At the other end, he can still defy all grades and subjects and engage the whole school on a common project. How skilfully it can be done may be seen from the following project worked out by the solitary teacher of a small rural school in Switzerland:

"In September, 1938, the writer visited a school in Forel, in the Canton of Vaud, called Pont de Pierre. It was a typical one-teacher school. About 35 boys and girls, ranging in age from six to fourteen, were busily working. The teacher was an alert young man full of initiative. The displays in the school-room gave evidence that no monotony ruled the lessons. The children had made all sorts of maps, charts, and current-event newsbooks, as well as freehand drawings and paintings. In one corner they had a museum of natural science, in another corner a library, and in a third corner a collection of national products. When the writer entered the school, two fifth-graders were observed standing in the back of the room discussing a map they had been drawing and painting. Conversation with them revealed the following story:

"In the summer of 1939 the city of Zurich was to hold a Swiss National Exhibition, an event which takes place every twenty-five years. The children were planning their trip to the Exhibition. All pupils were to go except the first- and second-graders. While the older youngsters studied the more intricate aspects of the journey, such as the important monuments to visit, things worth seeing at the exhibition, amount and wise distribution of time necessary for the entire trip, expenses involved, and other languages likely to be known, the fifth-graders were discussing various means of transportation and were determining what distance could be covered by foot. These semi-mountain youngsters wanted to use as many kinds of travel conveyances as possible, for not one of them had ever been on a bus, a boat, or a fast train. They were eager to get maximum results out of this eventful experience.

"They planned to leave the village on foot so that the little ones could go part of the way with them; next, they would climb over the near-by pass and later take a train to the shore of Lake Thun. Here they would transfer to a

boat. Once on the other shore, they would hike across a second pass and take a bus to Zurich. The return journey was to be routed differently. Not only did the pupils know the necessary time and cost involved but they had started to save money and were studying the history of the cantons through which they were to pass, the various costumes formerly worn by the people there, and the languages spoken. The pictures they had collected of Swiss costumes were remarkable. While at Zurich the young travellers expected to sleep in one of the city schools held open for this purpose, since the city children would be on summer vacation at that time. It can readily be seen that the teacher had enough curriculum material on hand to last a year. The children asked if they might sing one of the songs they had learnt for the trip. The teacher gave them permission, and, after he had given them the pitch with the help of a tuning fork, the whole group sang with well-trained voices a four-part song."<sup>73</sup>

This method of making the whole school work on a common project or unit of study has been greatly developed in America. It has even received a special name—the perpendicular unit—which is an indication of its consistent popularity.

If such units are possible in schools of eight grades, they ought certainly to be possible in Indian single-teacher schools where the number does not exceed five. The only pity is that we have not been able to give the subject all the attention it needs and deserves.

### Curriculum

In view of the various teaching devices suggested above for adoption in the single-teacher schools, a pertinent question is necessarily raised, viz., whether or not a separate curriculum should be designed for them. In India hardly any thought has been given to the problem; and probably the only attempt ever made in the matter was the publication, in 1940, of a simplified curriculum for single-teacher schools, by the Government of Bombay. No principle other than that of simplification or reduction of content was apparently adopted in designing this course; but in actual practice, it was hardly ever adopted by single-teacher schools so that all schools continued to use the same common syllabus. Notwithstanding this solitary exception of little value, it may be said that in India, the State Governments have prepared the curriculum primarily for urban schools and left the solitary teacher of the rural school to grapple with it as best as he can.

This policy has two fundamental defects. Firstly, it ignores the fact that the single-teacher school has large handicaps as compared with the urban school, and that it cannot be rightly expected to show the same results especially because the

<sup>73</sup>I. E. Schatzmann : The Country School, pp. 14-15.

attendance of a rural child is far less regular than that of an urban one. Secondly, it refuses to note that "the teacher in the small rural school is not prepared by education or experience to perform the technical task of reorganising the curriculum materials provided in the average course of study."<sup>74</sup> The recent trend in rural education, therefore, is to issue separate and detailed courses for use in single-teacher schools; or if that were not possible, to issue detailed instructions regarding the manner in which the general course would have to be adopted to meet the needs of small rural schools. India also will have to adopt either of these policies—preferably the first—at a very early date.

What the *content* of such a separate course for single-teacher schools should be is the next question. *Prima facie*, it would appear that it should be smaller and simpler. But the general tendency abroad is to resist any attempt at simplification on the ground that it implies the inferiority of single-teacher schools and that it sets the rural child at a disadvantage and vitiates the principle of "equality of educational opportunity". This is clearly seen in Australia. Here a specific objective of the Government is to see that a child is not necessarily handicapped in his educational advancement because his early education is given in a small school. Hence, an attempt is made to improve the techniques of teaching in small schools in order to enable the rural child to reach the same standards as are attained by an urban child. Separate and simplified courses of study for small rural schools, therefore, have not been issued in Australia. This is, indeed, a laudable and democratic objective and even in India, it would be desirable to have the same curriculum content both for single and multi-teacher schools.

But even if the content is the same, the internal organisation of the curriculum of a single-teacher school will have to be radically different from that of a multi-teacher school. The very fact that devices like combination of grades, plural-class teaching, etc., have to be adopted in single-teacher schools, shows that the content of the curriculum will have to be reorganised differently to suit them. It is rather a technical job to make this reorganisation successful. It will, therefore, have to be done by specially qualified personnel and any attempt to leave the matter to the teachers themselves will not bring in good results. In U.S.A. and Australia, it is a common practice to issue handbooks for teachers of small rural schools, containing detailed instructions regarding the manner in which they can reorganise the general curriculum to meet their special needs. In these publications, no attempt is made to dictate specified methods of reorganisation. All the same, a wealth of reorganised material is placed at the teacher's disposal and he is also allowed the freedom to invent, add or alter it according to his inclinations and capacities. In India, such handbooks are conspicuous by their

<sup>74</sup> Kate V. Wofford : *op. cit.*, p. 253.

absence, and one of the first tasks in the reconstruction of rural education will be to produce them in a thorough and practical fashion.

The problem of the special methods of teaching required to meet the needs of single-teacher schools need not be discussed further although the foregoing account does not claim to be complete. In the first place, it does not refer to several problems (e.g. home-work, silent-study, parent-teacher relationship, extra-curricular activities, etc.) which a single-teacher has to face and in all of which he has to use techniques which are materially different from those adopted in multi-teacher schools. Moreover, even in respect of the few problems it deals with, the objective has been to indicate the principles of the methods that can be used advantageously rather than to deal with all methods in a comprehensive manner. But as this brochure is addressed to administrators and teacher-educators and not to the teachers of small rural schools, the foregoing discussions of some of the special methods evolved in U.S.A. and Australia will serve our primary objective of indicating the nature of the pedagogic problems that face the single-teacher school and the manner in which they can be tackled.

## CHAPTER V

### General Estimate and Conclusion

The discussions in the two preceding chapters will give a broad idea of the complexity and importance of the administrative and pedagogic problems of the single-teacher school. If they are to be solved satisfactorily, it goes without saying that agencies capable of solving them have to be brought into play. The lead, of course, should come from the universities. They should organise experimental single-teacher schools under competent supervision, try out different methods of teaching and organisation and publish their findings. The Central Institute of Education, on which rests the main responsibility of leading and co-ordinating the educational research in all parts of the country, should make a beginning in the matter by conducting one or more single-teacher schools in the suburban villages of Delhi. The training colleges conducted by Government should also follow suit and, wherever possible, organise experimental single-teacher schools to work out specific plans or ideas. Each training school for primary teachers should, as suggested already, conduct one or more single-teacher schools for practical purposes.

But that is not enough. A practice school is necessarily an average school and its work generally gets so overloaded with the 'practice' of budding teachers that it is hardly ever possible to try new techniques in it. An experimental school is an entirely different affair. It is to be brought into existence and conducted with the special object of trying out some specially designed experiment under conditions which are as fully controlled as possible. It may not be possible for every primary teacher-training institution to conduct an experimental single-teacher school. But it is certainly not too much to suggest that the staff of a few of them may be adequately strengthened to enable them to conduct such experiments.

Private enterprise also, 'as Shri Saiyidain has suggested, can play an important role in conducting experimental single-teacher schools and in evolving new techniques. But in the present circumstances, it would be risky to leave this vital problem to the uncertain course of private enterprise. We need a planned, extensive and a vigorous lead and that can come from direct State action alone. The Five Year Plan proposes to be "selective" in its approach and to concentrate, among others, on such "pilot projects" as will help in reorientating the educational system of the country. The single-teacher school which will ultimately serve the educational needs of about three lakhs of villages can certainly be regarded as important enough to fall within this restricted

sphere; and one has a right to feel that experimental single-teacher schools have a priority claim, not only on State funds but on Central subsidies for education as well.

Experimental single-teacher schools will do all that is necessary to solve pedagogic problems. But the solution of the administrative problems will require action on the part of Education Department. Here, intensive surveys will have to be conducted and newer techniques and administrative procedures will have to be tried out. But these problems are much simpler on the whole and will be tackled satisfactorily and quickly if every State Education Department carries out one or two studies in the problem.

Research and experiment of the type described above will automatically create a good deal of literature on the subject. This new literature will also be useful and realistic because it will arise from first-hand experience of local conditions and not be a translation or adaptation of some foreign study conducted in an environment altogether different from ours. Such literature would naturally be in the regional languages; and it should, therefore, be an important function of the Central Bureau of Education to prepare brief digests from it for inter-State use and even for international purposes. When this literature becomes available, the teachers who are required to conduct the small rural schools will become more efficient and will, in their turn, be able to contribute to it. A virtuous circle will thus set in and the condition of the single-teacher schools will begin to improve rapidly.

India is not only a land of villages, but a land of very small villages which are scattered sparsely over the countryside and which resist all attempts at amalgamation. The single-teacher school, therefore, is going to remain with us as the *only* agency of spreading culture in more than half of our five lakhs of villages. A careful study of its problems, therefore, should have had a very high priority in our programme of educational reconstruction.

But unfortunately, the single-teacher school which had its roots deep down in our cultural past and had maintained an unbroken tradition for some thousands of years, was completely ignored by our modern Education Departments for the first 65 years of their existence. When at last they awoke, like Rip Van Winkle from their long slumbers, they started a terrible crusade to eliminate these schools on the ground that they were inefficient and wasteful. King Log was suddenly replaced by a terrible King Stork, and the poor frogs of the small rural schools were almost driven to pray for the return of the old times when they could at least live in peaceful neglect. But thanks to the advent of popular ministries and the attainment of independence, the crusade came to an end and the single-teacher school was given, not only the right to live, but also the honourable status of an indispensable agency to carry the torch to those forsaken places which need them most.



In spite of this political change, however, some of the old shackles remain. The tutelage of our officials is still unbroken so that some of them still feel unhappy at the ever-increasing numbers of single-teacher schools; and even those who tolerate them, are generally disposed to regard them as "necessary evils". Our educational research is definitely out of its cradle; but even today, it is so fully occupied with urban problems that it is not even possible to indicate when it will walk out to the villages and stand face to face with the single-teacher schools. In the meanwhile, the poor solitary teacher of this school continues to live and work under great handicaps—poverty, poor general education, inadequate training (if received at all), unsatisfactory supervision, and utter lack of necessary books and materials, so that the "hungry sheep"—the few unfortunate youngsters entrusted to his amateurish, and often indifferent, care "look up and are not fed".

It is high time that vigorous attempts were made to end this sorry state of affairs. The first step would be to change the typically urban mental attitude of our average administrator and teacher-educator and to convince him that the single-teacher school need not be a necessary evil. In fact, he should be made to realise that they are both a challenge and an opportunity, and that they can be made to develop into good educational institutions which would have several excellent features of modern education to their credit.

The next step would be to study the research and experimental work done about the single-teacher schools in all parts of the world and especially in Australia, U.S.A. and Sweden. This will provide several ideas to make a start.

The third step would then be to pool our own experience by surveying the problem on an all-India basis.

Finally, research and experimentation on the problem should be organised through universities, Education Departments and suitable private agencies. This will generate a new life and create a new literature that will enable the single-teacher schools to come into their own, and thereby help to build up a new life in thousands of our small villages.

## APPENDIX A

### The Use of Monitors in Victoria

Victorian teachers make use of monitors to serve two main functions. They may act as work-lieutenants, whose duties are to look to the supplies of ink, paper, pencils and other materials, the decoration of the room, the supervision of the playground, and similar activities. Monitors of this kind are, of course, welcome.

The second kind of monitor is the substitute teacher. Most Victorian head teachers make a distinction between the 'class monitor', who is left in charge of his own class to supervise and direct such drill work as oral reading, dictation and tables, and the 'teaching monitor', who is taken away from his own group to direct the activities of pupils who are less advanced and in a lower class.

Many returns stress the necessity of a wise selection of teaching monitors. They must have such qualities as will enable them to play effectively the teaching role. As well as superior knowledge or skill, they must have some of the sympathy, the vivacity, the power to interest and to command attention, and the ability to question and to deal with answers which characterize the successful teacher.

The head teacher cannot, of course, expect to find in his school community a batch of natural or born assistant teachers. He must devote time and care to the special training of his monitors. In our returns from Victorian teachers, we encountered frequently such statements as the following:

'Monitors are of little assistance if they are not trained'.

'Monitors are instructed before hand as to what is to be done, and how it is to be done'.

So the head teacher gives model lessons which the monitors attend, armed with pencil and note-book. He shows them what faults to look for in reading, how to give a dictation lesson, how to diagnose errors in elementary arithmetic. He gets his monitors to give special lessons which are criticised by other monitors. Before school, and at recess times, the monitors come to him for final instructions and guidance. He holds a weekly conference, a staff-meeting, at which he outlines the monitorial duties for the next week, and gives necessary help. He does not call upon monitors to serve unexpectedly, but carefully prepares a roster of duties which is attached to the time-table, so that each substitute-teacher knows, well beforehand, what he has to do, and for what he must prepare.

In the actual work of the classroom monitors are used, as noted, for two main purposes. They may direct drill work in their own class, or they may take charge of pupils lower in the school. It is particularly for the latter purpose that head teachers find their services invaluable. The very young pupils in the two lowest classes do have a fairly constant need of direction and supervision. In many Victorian schools, indeed, Grades I and II, unless they are receiving a lesson from the head teacher, appear always to be in the charge of a monitor.

The scope of the work which is entrusted to monitors may best be indicated by quoting from the returns from two schools. In one of these schools, the head teacher allots to monitors the following tasks :

- (a) Number work in junior grades.
- (b) Oral reading throughout the school.
- (c) Dictation and spelling throughout the school.
- (d) The hearing of poetry.
- (e) Stories in junior grades.
- (f) Writing in Grades I and II.
- (g) Occupation work in Grades I and II.
- (h) Revision work in history and geography, Grades III to VIII.

The second return mentions the activities listed below:

Grades I and II : All subjects.

Grades III and IV : Spelling, tables, reading poetry, drawing.

Grades V to VIII : Reading, dictation, poetry, revision work in social studies.

It is clear that if teachers can safely entrust to monitors all the activities listed above, the task of instructing eight classes becomes much easier.

We have noted that the wise head-teacher selects his monitors carefully, gives them a thorough training, and plans ahead the tasks which they are asked to perform. Further than this, he lends to them all the moral support which they may need. Very frequently he sees their lessons well started before he moves away to take his own lesson. He never fails to visit them before the end of the period, in order to test their work and to clinch important points. He keeps his eye on the whole school, and his finger on the pulse of every group. The consequence is that both the children being taught and the monitor doing the teaching, feel that the head teacher is quietly noting all that is being done, and that due regard will be had both to good and bad work. As one teacher writes of these assistants, 'The head teacher must supervise their work while teaching in another department, and no monitor's work should remain unchecked at the close of the period. In no way must the monitor's division be allowed to feel that the teacher is not in charge'.

(Taken from *The Rural Schools in Australia*, pp. 205-077).

## APPENDIX B

### Time-table for Small Schools in Rural Areas

The time-table which follows presents some very interesting special features. The teacher has shown the way his teaching forces are organized during the day. S indicates a silent study lesson, from text-books or prepared assignments, or expression work such as written composition. T indicates a lesson which the teacher directs in person. It is clear that for some of these lessons the teacher spends but a portion of the lesson period with one class, devoting the remainder to class work elsewhere or to general supervision. He plans to open up new work, to set exercises, and then perhaps to return for a final summing-up of the lesson. O indicates oral work in which the children are guided either by leaders within the class group, monitors, or the teacher. M indicates the presence of a monitor as the directing agent. It will be noted that the monitor is present for drill, revision, or follow-up work, in short, in those lessons where a great amount of adjustment of methods, of the giving of new impressions, is not required. We should like to stress this important point, namely, that in no period is the teacher so preoccupied with one class that the general oversight of his school is neglected. The teacher in charge of a rural school has to acquire skill in directing the work of many groups. He must note the flagging of interest, the varying rates of study, and the reactions of individual pupils to the different school occupations.

The time-table under discussion shows a judicious grouping of lessons. Subjects requiring intensive drill methods come fairly early in the morning, after the opening exercises whose purpose is to provide a pleasant social beginning to the day's work. The motivating value of such exercises is often not fully realized. Rightly used, they contribute in no small way to the emotional setting for a good day's work.

Lessons are varied in sequence—a good point in sustaining the interest of children. Lesson periods are, in the main, of short duration. This is a wise arrangement in a small school. From our study of small schools in session we have come to the conclusion that none but very competent teachers can make much out of lengthy lesson intervals. Where a time-table is based on twenty and forty minute periods the teacher usually sub-divides the major period, even when this division is not shown on the time-table. The day ends with lessons in which the main responses of the pupils are in the form of appreciations or physical activities.

TIME-  
Small School, Rural

	9-5	9-30	9-35	10-5	10-10	10-40	10-50	11-0	11-15
MONDAY	7, 8 5, 6 3, 4 1, 2			Maths. S Arith. T Read. O Numb. M Read. T		Maths. S Arith. S Arith. T Read. M Numb. M			
TUESDAY	7, 8 5, 6 3, 4 1, 2	Inspection and Assembly	Spelling	Geom. T Arith. S Read. O Numb. T Read. M	Speech Training	Maths. S Arith. S Arith. S Read. M Numb. T		Recess	
WEDNESDAY	7, 8 5, 6 3, 4 1, 2	Song, Morning Talk, Nature Study	Spelling	Maths. S Arith. T Read. S Numb. T Read. M	Song. Roll Call.	Maths. S Read. S Arith. T Read. M Numb. T	Speech Training		
THURSDAY	7, 8 5, 6 3, 4 1, 2			Maths. T Arith. T Read. O Numb. S Read. M		Maths. T Arith. S Arith. T Read. M Numb. T		Recess	
FRIDAY	7, 8 5, 6 3, 4 1, 2			Maths. S Arith. T Read. S Numb. T Read. M		Maths. T Arith. S Grammar T Numb. S Read. M			Physical Exercises

TABLE  
District, Victoria

11-45	12-15	1-15	1-20	1-50	2-20	2-30	2-35	3-5	3-30
Social S Studies T Writing T Writing M	Dictation M Dictation M Geo. T Wd. Bld. M	Lunch Recess	Practical Hygiene	Grammar T Grammar S Arith. S Trans. M	Drawing T Drawing T Wd. Bldg. S Hand. Wk. M	Recess	Spelling	Comp. T (Oral) Comp. T (Oral) Diet. M Story M	Speech Training T
Health T 20), Spelling 10 Drawing T Drawing M	Read T Reading S Comp. (Oral) O Comp. M (Written)			Grammar S Grammar T Arith. S Writing M	Drawing T Drawing T Spelling 10 Health Spelling 10 Health M			Social T Studies S Spelling S Plays M	Music T
Social S Studies Nature Study T	Poetry T Poetry T Grammar S Writing M			Wd. Bld. T Grouping S Poetry T Poetry M	Social S Studies T Diet. M Transl. M			Dict. M Dict. M Drawing T Drawing T	Games T
Rural Science T Writing M Writing M	Rural Science T Drawing T Drawing T			Grammar S Grammar T Arith. S Numb. M	Comp. S Comp. S Wd. Bldg. S Wd. Bldg. T			Drawing T Drawing T Comp. S Comp. M	Litt. S Reading S History T Hand-book M
Social Studies T Geog. Notes. S Wd. Bldg. T	Literature S Read. T Comp. T Comp. M			Writing T Writing Poetry S Poetry S	Hand Wk. Hand Wk. T Hand Wk. M Hand Wk.			Hand Wk. T Hand Wk. T Hand Wk. M Hand Wk. M	Scripture Stories

(Taken from the Rural School in Australia, pp. 196-198)

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