



School

Gender and Social Equity in Primary Education

Hierarchies of Access

Editor
Vimala Ramachandran

GENDER AND SOCIAL EQUITY
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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EDITED BY
VIMALA RAMACHANDRAN

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ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY OF INDIAN TERMS

ADWB	Adi Dravida Welfare Board (Tamil Nadu)
AIE	Alternative and Innovative Education
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (Government health worker)
APO	Assistant Project Officer
APPEP	Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project
AS	Alternative School
ASP	Active School Programme (Maharashtra)
AWC	Anganwadi Centre
BAG	Block Academic Group (Chhattisgarh)
BC	Backward Castes
BEP	Bihar Education Project
BGVS	Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (NGO associated with Total Literacy Campaigns)
BRC	Block Resource Centre
CAG	Cluster Academic Group (Chhattisgarh)
CPR	Classroom Process Reports
CRC	Cluster Resource Centre
Dalit	SC groups listed in the IX Schedule of the Constitution of India
DIET	District Institute of Education and Training
DISE	District Information System for Education
DOE	Department of Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
DPO	District Project Office
DRG	District Resource Group
DSERT	Directorate of State Educational Research and Training

EC	European Commission
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEPO	European Commission Education Project Office
Ed.CIL	Educational Consultants India Limited
EFA	Education for All
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme
EMIS	Educational Management Information System
FGD	Focus-Group Discussion
GAR	Gross Access Ratio
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GHPS	Government Higher Primary School
GLPS	Government Lower Primary School
GOI	Government of India
GPS	Government Primary School
Gram Panchayat	Village level local self-government and administrative unit (revenue village) comprising a number of habitations
Gram Sabha	General body meeting of the gram panchayat
HDR	Human Development Report
HPS	Higher Primary School
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme
IED	Integrated Education and Development
IIPS	International Institute of Population Sciences, Mumbai
ILM	Integrated Learning Materials
J&K	Jammu and Kashmir
JRM	Joint Review Mission
KSSP	Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad
Kuccha Road	Non-metalled road
Kuccha Building	Building not made with cement, bricks or stone but with mud and thatch with mud flooring
LJ	Lok Jumbish
LSA	Lok Sampark Abhiyan
MBC	Most Backward Castes
MEO	Mandal Education Officer
MFP	Minor Forest Produce
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MLL	Minimum Levels of Learning

MRP	Mandal Resource Person
MSP	Mahila Samakhya Programme
MTA	Mother Teacher Association
NCERT	National Council for Educational Research and Training
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NFE	Non-formal Education
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NIEPA	National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
NPE	National Policy of Education
NRBC	Non-residential Bridge Centre
NSS	National Sample Survey
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
OBC	Other Backward Castes
PDS	Public Distribution System
PEDSK	Primary Education Development Society of Kerala
PHC	Public Healthcare Centre
PMIS	Project Management Information System
POA	Programme of Action (of the National Policy of Education)
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
PROBE	Public Report on Basic Education (1999)
PS	Primary School
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
Pucca	Proper cemented building
PUPS	Panchayat Union Primary School
RGSM	Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission (Madhya Pradesh)
SC	Scheduled Castes
SCERT	State Council for Educational Research and Training
SCR	Student Classroom Ratio
SDMC	School Development and Monitoring Committee
SEC	School Education Committee
SHG	Self-help Group
SK	Shiksha Karmi
SMC	School Management Committee

SPK	Shiksha Protsahan Kendra
SRG	State Resource Group
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
SSK	Shishu Shiksha Kendra (Madhya Pradesh)
ST	Scheduled Tribes
TLC	Total Literacy Campaign
TLM	Teaching Learning Material
TPR	Teacher Pupil Ratio
TSG	Technical Support Group (Based in Ed.CIL)
UEE	Universal of Elementary Education
UPBEP	Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Project
UPE	Universal Primary Education
UT	Union Territory
VA	Voluntary Agency
VEC	Village Education Committee
VECC	Village Education Construction Committee
VER	Village Education Register
VLC	Village Level Committee
WB	West Bengal

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Vimala Ramachandran
January 2004

ONE

DESK RESEARCH

I INTRODUCTION

Vimala Ramachandran

As one looks back over the last 54 years of Indian Independence, it is heartening to note that finally, after years of slow progress, the 1990s turned out to be one of the most productive decades in primary education—a decade not only of churning but also one where the country made a significant leap in literacy rates. While there is still a long way to go before we are able to ensure good-quality basic education for all children up to the age of 14, there is optimism in the air and the overall environment is positive. The historic 2001 Census of India revealed that 65.4 per cent of the people (75.85 per cent among men and 54.16 per cent among women) are now literate, and that for the first time the absolute number of illiterates has actually gone down.

The census also revealed a decadal jump of 11.8 per cent in the literacy rate among men and 15 per cent among women. Hitherto backward regions like Chhattisgarh recorded a jump of 24.87 per cent in literacy levels among women. Madhya Pradesh was not far behind with a 20.93 per cent jump in female literacy. Rajasthan showed an impressive increase of 21.47 per cent (M) and 23.90 per cent (F) in literacy levels (see Appendix Table 2.1).

A range of new programmes was initiated during this period and most important, the government mobilised considerable external resources for primary education.¹ Administrators, political leaders, the media and ordinary people are talking about what the census reveals, and again, for the first time since Independence, most observers agree that we no longer need to convince people about the value of primary education. The question now is one of ensuring access to functioning and good-quality schools,

a trend confirmed by research studies on the growth of private (recognised and unrecognised) schools in the 1990s.

It is important to acknowledge at the very outset that a wide range of government and non-government initiatives were introduced in the 1990s that made a deep impact on the discourse on primary education in the country. Starting with Shiksha Karmi (1987) and Lok Jumbish (1992) in Rajasthan which compelled administrators to explore the coexistence of different models, and the bold initiative of the government of Madhya Pradesh in the form of an Education Guarantee Scheme (1996), administrators were willing to think afresh.

In the non-governmental sector, bridge courses pioneered by the M.V. Foundation of Hyderabad (1991) and the Pratham initiative of Mumbai (1994) in several states across the country have given non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other institutions a tangible goal—getting out-of-school children back into formal schools. Similarly, the Appropriate Education Programme of the Concerned for Working Children of Karnataka initiated in 1996 works with the formal school system to improve quality and prevent children from dropping out. Many organisations now view these strategies not only as effective mechanisms to build bridges to formal education, but also to exert pressure on primary, middle and high schools to function better. Starting from the important debate on child labour and primary education in the mid-1980s to citizens' initiatives to revitalise and strengthen primary education in urban areas, the environment is indeed positive for people working in this sector.

Practitioners and advocates of basic education genuinely believe that given a big push we may finally be able to gather enough momentum to ensure universal access and also good-quality basic education. The next five years are thus going to be quite crucial for us in India. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan would not only have to build on the strengths of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) but also, more importantly, learn from problems and constraints in order to ensure that every single child in the age group 6–14 not only has physical, but also meaningful access to good-quality primary education. Creating multiple exit points, especially after class eight, and providing a range of opportunities for vocational education, skill training, livelihood counselling—as well as opportunities for out-of-school children to improve their educational level through accelerated learning programmes—could strengthen primary education. This is of particular importance for girls who have almost no opportunities for training or continuing education.

UNDERSTANDING GENDER AND SOCIAL DISPARITIES

Explanations of educational disadvantage, particularly in the context of gender and social attributes, often focus on the supply dimensions of the problem—that if we could only invest more resources into schools, the problem could be solved. Accompanying this is the formulation of a demand that considerations of labour requirements and cultural factors depress the desire for education. These arguments are most commonly advanced in the context of girls as also for those from groups hitherto excluded from the education loop.

Fortunately, Indian education planners have rarely accepted these explanations at face value. The National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986 stressed that the central issue was the ‘removal of disparities and to equalise educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far’ (GOI 1986). The focus was both on education and social equality. The Programme of Action (POA) 1992 correctly highlighted the intervening and empowering role of education in people’s struggles for equality and justice (GOI 1992a).

With respect to Scheduled Castes (SC), the NPE (GOI 1986) declared: ‘The central focus in the SC’s educational development is their equalisation with the non-SC population in all stages and levels of education, in all areas and in all four dimensions—rural and urban, male and female.’ The policy focused on incentives, scholarships, reservations, recruitment of teachers, location of school buildings and, most important, ‘constant micro-planning and verification to ensure that the enrolment, retention and successful completion of courses by SC students do not fall at any stage alongside provision of remedial courses to improve their prospects for further education and employment’ (GOI 1986).

Similarly, on the educational participation of Scheduled Tribes (ST), the policy laid stress on locating more schools in tribal areas (including residential schools) and being sensitive to the social and cultural milieu of the tribals. More specifically, it talked of the need to ‘develop curricula and devise instructional materials in tribal languages at the initial stage, with arrangements for switching over to the regional language subsequently’. The NPE also recognised that a similar focused/targeted approach is necessary for other educationally backward groups/communities: for the first time the educational needs of handicapped (physically and mentally challenged) children was brought under the policy ambit as central to concerns of equity.

All the above function with special force in the case of the girl child with patriarchal discrimination adding to distortions in perceptions and programmes caused by class and social disabilities.

Essentially, the government proposed a four-pronged strategy to bridge the gap in primary education:

- Increase enrolment through campaigns and outreach on the one hand, and provide creche and pre-school facilities to free siblings from childcare responsibilities on the other.
- Provide incentives (textbooks, uniforms, midday meals, scholarships, free residential schools—especially in tribal areas) to ensure sustained participation by addressing the ‘cost’ of schooling.
- Enhance learning achievement through ‘mother-tongue education’, improve curricula and ensure that children achieve the Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL) through intensive training and capacity building of teachers, improved teacher cadre and management and grievance redressal.
- Improve infrastructure and teacher deployment, thereby fixing supply and making the system work.

These broad policy goals were sought to be actualised through concrete measures taken by the central government (beginning as early with strategic placement of primary education on the concurrent list in independent India) through gradual increase in central investment in primary education (as being different from expenditure incurred by state governments) over the years through a range of special programmes—the most recent additions in the 1990s being the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project, Environmental Education, Rajasthan Shiksha Karmi Project, Total Literacy Campaign, Mahila Samakhya, Bihar Education Project, Rajasthan Lok Jumbish and the Uttar Pradesh Education Project.

Nevertheless, it needs to be admitted that despite improvement, gaps continue to exist between states, by residence, gender and social groupings. The historical baggage of social and economic inequalities reinforcing educational disparities has been commented upon for over 50 years now. There is also a realisation that extant macro data, however, makes it difficult to capture these gaps. Therefore, researchers and practitioners alike have relied on qualitative micro studies to capture regional and context-specific nuances. More specifically, researchers and administrators have pointed out that we need to be careful about relying on gross enrolment

data, particularly from schools and the education department, since they have a tendency to over-report. Instead, they stress the need to look at net enrolment, retention, transition and average years of schooling data disaggregated by gender, social grouping and type of school to assess the effectivity of different policies. These, it is argued, must be complemented by data on dropouts and on those who have never attended school. It is well known and universally acknowledged that there are still extant populations among girls, SCs and STs who do not manage to access any form of schooling, and when they do, are afflicted by high dropout rates.

Acknowledging the complexities involved in addressing gender and social equity, this report takes the official definition of equality as its point of departure. The overall decline in access, infrastructure, functionality and quality affect all children. However, owing to social inequalities and hierarchies these factors affect the poor—among them girls and those from socially deprived groupings—more than the relatively privileged. The latter, in any case, are increasingly moving out of government schools into private—aided and unaided—institutions. Further, even when they access government schools, they rely on private tuitions to supplement school instruction.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE DISTRICT PRIMARY EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The DPEP was initiated as a part of the larger Social Safety Net Credit Adjustment Loan under the Structural Adjustment Programme of the World Bank to India in 1991. Taking off from the policy guidelines of the NPE 1986 and drawing upon the experiences of a range of primary education programmes, the DPEP guidelines of 1994 state that holistic planning and management is necessary to achieve universal primary education, and that it 'should incorporate a gender perspective in all aspects of the planning and implementation process' (GOI 1995). It recognises the importance of mainstreaming gender and making it an integral part of DPEP, the need for gender focus in tackling the problem of access, retention and achievement levels as well as the importance of reaching out to children from the most disadvantaged groups/communities. Educationally backward districts with female literacy below the national average were taken as priority districts. Equally, the programme stressed on education for socially disadvantaged groups. The goals set by DPEP are:

- Reduce differences in enrolment, dropout rates and learning achievements between gender and social groups to less than 5 per cent.
- Reduce overall primary dropout rates for all students to less than 10 per cent.
- Raise average achievement levels by at least 25 per cent over measured baseline levels by ensuring achievement of basic literacy and numeracy competencies and a minimum of 40 per cent achievement levels in other competencies for all primary-school children.
- Provide access to primary schooling or its equivalent non-formal education for all children.

These goals bring out the programme's intent to increase the coverage of girls, improve their academic achievements and reduce gender disparities in respect to enrolment, retention and learning achievements (DPEP 2000j). Essentially, DPEP adopted a two-pronged strategy to meet the gender and social equity goals, namely:

- Make the education system more responsive to the needs and constraints of girls and children from disadvantaged communities.
- Create community demand for girls' education and enabling conditions for greater participation.

In pursuance of these objectives, DPEP created monitoring systems and structures to track gender and equity issues. The information and monitoring system of DPEP consisted of the following:

- Project Management Information System (PMIS) to capture inputs—teacher deployment, civil works, training, research completed, expenditure and reimbursement—thereby tracking both physical and financial information.
- District Information System for Education (DISE) to capture enrolment, teacher deployment, classroom and performance indicators like Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), repetition rates, student-classroom ratio and pupil-teacher ratio. The data was to be disaggregated by gender and SC/ST.
- Biannual Joint Review Missions, research studies and, most recently, household surveys to estimate the number of out-of-school children to enable the government and donor partners to assess progress

towards short-term, medium-term and long-term development objectives.

- The DPEP MIS cell based in NIEPA developed the **Index of Gender Equity** and **Index of Social Equity** to track progress towards gender and social equity objectives. This continues to be a mandatory exercise in reporting on progress.

In 2001, DPEP was operational in 18 states and 271 districts, after taking into account recent bifurcations and trifurcations in districts and the carving out of three new states. Twenty-three districts of Gujarat, Orissa and Rajasthan were included very recently, i.e., April 2001 (Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1
DPEP coverage: phase I and phase II

<i>State</i>	<i>Districts</i>
Andhra Pradesh	19
Assam	9
Bihar	20 (educational districts)
Chhattisgarh	15
Gujarat	11
Haryana	7
Himachal Pradesh	4
Jharkhand	7 (educational districts)
Karnataka	17
Kerala	6
Madhya Pradesh	33
Maharashtra	11
Orissa	16
Rajasthan	19
Tamil Nadu	7
Uttar Pradesh	54
Uttaranchal	6
West Bengal	10
Total 18 states	271 districts

Source: European Commission Education Project Office,
New Delhi, August 2001, updated August 2002.

THE STARTING POINT OF THIS STUDY

A large number of documents and reports have been produced under the aegis of DPEP. Apart from biannual progress reports prepared by the

government for Joint Review Missions, a number of studies have been published by NIEPA, Ed.CIL and NCERT.

One may ask how yet another study on DPEP would add to the existing body of knowledge. This study—Gender and Equity Assessment of DPEP—was commissioned by the European Commission and the Elementary Education (EE) Bureau, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, to carry out an analytical review of progress reports, data and other research documents from a gender and equity perspective. The objective of this study is to assess to what extent and how DPEP has succeeded in the following:

- Reaching its equity objectives in the programme districts in terms of enrolment, retention and completion.
- Reducing disparities across the districts and states in terms of the above mentioned outcome indicators by gender and other special focus groups.
- Introducing policies, systems and practices that aim at improving the participation of girls, women and the disadvantaged communities in primary education and its development, organisation and management.

METHODOLOGY

This was initially designed as a desk study with documentation of some best practices.² The starting point of the desk research was a listing of gender and equity issues highlighted in existing documents.³ This preliminary listing of issues helped us identify the key areas of inquiry. Our objective was to unpack the secondary material and sift the generic strategies from innovations as also to analyse if smaller innovations have influenced/impacted the larger project. This was done by listing the strategies, reasons for adopting the strategy, expected impact and geographic spread (where, how many clusters, blocks/districts). We also tried to include variations in models adopted in different areas (see Appendix Table 4.1).

We also tried to examine if gender and equity issues had been ‘mainstreamed’, or whether they remained sporadic and localised. This led us to analyse if and how equity strategies were mainstreamed and whether Education Guarantee Schools/Alternative Schools (EGS/AS) are fast

emerging as *the* vehicle to bridge the equity gap, especially with respect to children from disadvantaged communities and in scattered habitations.

At this stage, the research team voiced concern about what this study expected to add to the existing body of knowledge, especially since the programme itself has generated an enormous amount of documentation. We identified the following areas for in-depth analysis:

- What DPEP data reveals and what it does not.
- Analytical review of gender and equity strategies adopted in DPEP.
- Institutional mechanisms adopted to address gender and equity issues.
- What has changed inside the classroom.
- EGS/AS—an important equity strategy.
- Where are we today—an overall picture.

An important focus of our research relates to a subtle but nevertheless discernible hierarchy of access in education. While overall enrolment and access to primary schooling has shown significant improvement in the last decade, there continues to exist a hard core of children from socially and economically deprived strata and remote areas who escape the net of primary educational facilities. More disturbing is the fact, evident from recent studies (Aggarwal 2000a, Krishnaji 2001, De et al. 2001) that the process of increased universalisation is accompanied by growing segregation by class, caste and gender.

More than the growth in government schools, the recent years have seen a proliferation of private schools, both aided and unaided, and alternative and education guarantee schools. It appears that boys, particularly from the better-off sections, are increasingly being sent to private schools. An overwhelming majority of children in government schools are from poor families—a large proportion from dalit and tribal households. In some areas it appears that while in borderline families sons are sent to private aided or unaided schools, daughters are sent to government schools. Similarly, among the poor, even where all children are enrolled, a large proportion of the girls are in non-formal centres (AS/EGS). Lok Jumbish data shows that nearly two-thirds of all children in non-formal centres are girls. Finally, while the boys attending government schools continue up to class V and sometimes class VIII, girls are pulled out or drop out quickly (Srivastava 2001).

However, it is also noticed that in regions where government schools are dysfunctional and the only accessible alternative is an AS or EGS,

even the marginally better-off send their children to these schools (see Chapter 9). This does not contest the finding that in the main, the overwhelming proportion of children from SC/ST families and girls (especially from OBC and poor families) are in alternative schools, be they Shiksha Karmi schools in Rajasthan, EGS in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh and AS in Andhra Pradesh (Ramachandran and Sethi 2001).

These trends have serious implications both for the quality of schooling and policy. Since many of the poor and socially deprived are first-generation learners, they require more inputs. Instead, all they can access are under-funded and poorly functioning government schools and alternative schools, of which many have just a single teacher. Further, since the better-off are increasingly turning to private schools, the pressure on government schools, which cater to the poor, to improve is reduced. This combination of increasing enrolment in private unaided schools and a clustering of the poor and socially deprived in AS/EGS schools indicates that the formal increase in SC/ST enrolment is less positive than it might appear. The push towards privatisation, whether by default or design, may well be penalising those who require greater help in a situation of structural dualism.

Existing DPEP data does not lend itself to a layered and textured analysis of what is happening on the ground. While the broad trends are encouraging, the research team felt that it was not possible to come to grips with gender and equity issues without access to micro-study information. Existing DPEP data is not disaggregated by caste, community, gender and economic status, for example, where gender break-up is available, the caste/ community is not specified, and where the data is disaggregated by SC/ST, gender is left out. The economic status of households is not captured at all. The only source which makes available such textured data is the 1993 NCAER Human Development Report (NCAER 1999) and to a degree, National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) data with literacy levels/school participation information made available by caste, economic status and gender. But since the NCAER/HDR data predates DPEP, it was not possible to utilise it for making an assessment of the achievements of DPEP.

The inability of the existing EMIS data to adequately capture equity-related issues, especially with respect to the hardest-to-reach group in DPEP districts instigated the decision to modify the original intention of documenting best practices in one panchayat in each of the six states

(Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Haryana). Instead it was felt that the need of the hour was micro studies of the representative panchayats across the six states in order to come to grips with locally specific issues with respect to gender and social equity that are relevant on a daily basis. Further, the research team felt this was of great importance, given the overwhelming evidence pointing to micro-village level variations in educational access (Vaidyanathan and Nair 2001). This exercise, it was felt, would enable us to develop tools to make a more extensive gender and equity assessment of DPEP at a later stage. The time frame of the desk research and micro studies was 1 April to 15 October 2001, i.e., six-and-a-half months.

Macro trends seem to indicate significant progress in primary education across the DPEP districts. The commissioned micro studies/village studies while endorsing some of the broad trends also insightfully reveal context-specific barriers that influence participation of children, parents and community in the educational enterprise. These studies are particularly useful in throwing light on the local social, economic and political factors that tend to be ignored in educational policy-making since they are not identified as falling within the ambit of the issue on hand. Issues like caste, social practices like untouchability or child marriage and spatial segregation on the basis of community in the village are pervasive in our society and have considerable impact on educational performance.

No single programme, however extensive it may be, can hope to correct over five decades of educational imbalances and inequalities. While acknowledging that DPEP is perhaps the most ambitious primary education initiative in independent India, eight years is indeed a short time to bring about radical changes and turn the system upside down. Therefore, at the outset, the report acknowledges that the social and economic dynamics that frame educational access is not the creation of any programme, but a historical baggage—a product of over five decades of social development and educational planning.

However, the village studies remind us that the true success of DPEP, especially the promise enshrined in decentralisation and the twin objectives of gender and social equity, is contingent on its abilities to successfully engage with these extra-educational issues in order to bridge the gap between its rhetoric and reality in a meaningful way (see Chapter 7 for an overall review and methodology). The context of implementation is undoubtedly a crucial factor in the successful implementation of any policy.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

As indicated earlier, this report involves both desk research and micro-field studies. Chapter 2 surveys the data generated by DPEP and other national sample surveys for the last decade with a special focus on teasing out the gender and social equity dimensions in primary education. It also discusses the weaknesses in the current methodology of computing the 'gaps'—both social and gender—specifically in the reliance on gross enrolment data. Chapter 3 discusses issues related to hierarchies in the access to education and whether the current trends (of a shift by the better-off to private schooling) and policies, while enhancing universalisation may simultaneously be resulting in a segregation with poorer, socially deprived groups (including girls) being clustered in government and alternative non-formal schools. Chapter 4 elaborates on the various institutional mechanisms and strategies—specifically DPEP—to improve schooling and reduce inequalities. An effort is made to assess the efficacy of various strategies, whether they remain localised or have impacted the mainstream. Chapter 5 on alternative and education guarantee schools explores the strengths and weaknesses of various non-formal education initiatives (from bridge courses to EG schools in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh) in addressing the specific constraints of those with low access to formal schools. In particular, he points to the paradox of evolving a system of providing some access to those hitherto left out but without following it up with creating a viable alternative stream. As such, it appears that the pressure towards uniformity (of textbooks and pedagogy) mitigates against the original analysis of why these children have so far remained left out. The final chapter analyses classroom processes through a content analysis of DPEP-initiated innovations and whether they have been successful in, at least partially, mitigating the negative attitudes towards girls and children from socially deprived communities.

Section II of the report contains six micro studies and a synthesis overview by Vimala Ramachandran and Aarti Saihjee. As indicated earlier, desk-based reviews of secondary data and evaluation reports suffer from certain limitations, particularly in assessing the differential impact of educational initiatives at the village level or on different groups of people within the village. Qualitative micro studies were thus seen as useful supplements to the desk study since they provide in-depth information about the values, motivations and perceptions of parents, students, teachers and community members regarding primary schooling and DPEP initiatives.

It must be stressed that though the location for each micro study was selected through a purposive random sample, the objective was not to provide generalisations but insights into processes on the ground. Nevertheless, by selecting government primary schools, AS/EGS and private schools for observation, individual and group interviews as well as cohort analyses, it does appear that while the demand for education has been enhanced significantly, there is a clear segregation by class, caste and gender regarding the type of school accessed. Equally, there still remains a group of children that is not attending school, even if enrolled. Finally, despite the setting up of Village Education Committees (VECs), the 'real' participation of the community is depressingly low. It seems evident that the object of ensuring meaningful and quality universalisation of primary education is still, tantalisingly, some distance away.

NOTES

1. Discussing the spurt in elementary education spending in 1995–96, Sajitha Bashir points out, 'After deducting the expenditure on these two programmes (DPEP and Lok Jumbish), real plan expenditure (domestic) for elementary education has grown at the rate of 22 per cent per annum, compared to 27 per cent per annum when external funds are included. Thus, the increase in domestic funding has been the main factor in raising Plan expenditure on elementary education' (p. 12).
2. The EC has also supported another independent research project, *Understanding the Challenge of UEE for the Poorest and Other Deprived Groups* by Dr J. Jha and Mr D. Jhingran. The study focuses on household decision-making processes to assess the ways in which different forms of deprivation affect children's participation in schooling and to arrive at suitable policy and implementation level suggestions for ensuring full participation by the poorest and other deprived groups.
3. In particular, we started our listing of issues with Dr Yash Aggarwal's comprehensive report, 'An Assessment of Trends in Access and Retention' published by DPEP and NIEPA in November 2000; research studies/surveys and select reports of the Joint Review Missions.

2 WHAT DPEP AND OTHER DATA SOURCES REVEAL

Leela Visaria
Vimala Ramachandran

Article 45 of the Indian Constitution declares that 'the State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution, free, and compulsory education of all children until they complete the age of 14 years'. The Constitution also guarantees educational rights for minorities and calls for the educational development of weaker sections of society such as SCs and STs. The declaration was made in 1950, around the time when 29 per cent of Indian men and 3 per cent of women aged seven years and above were counted as literate in a total population of 361 million (GOI 1991a: 3). The gross enrolment ratios in primary school classes (roughly ages 6–10 years) during 1950–51 were estimated to be 61 per cent for boys and 25 per cent for girls. The enrolment ratios for the higher primary classes (ages 11–14) were a dismal 21 per cent and 5 per cent for boys and girls, respectively (GOI 1998: 7). Of those enrolled, we do not know what percentage of boys and girls aged 6–14 years were actually attending school. In all likelihood, schooling for girls was confined to the upper strata of society living mostly in urban India.

From such a low base at the time when the Indian Constitution was drafted, providing education to all children aged 6–14 years in a period of 10 years or by 1960, was indeed an uphill task. To achieve this would have required not only a strong political will, serious bureaucratic commitment and mammoth investment in development of infrastructure such as school buildings and teacher training, but also social engineering in order to mobilise Indian parents to send their daughters, and more specifically the disadvantaged communities to send their children, boys and girls, to schools. That the promise has eluded us is evidenced by the fact that even in the new millennium, we have not succeeded in achieving

universal literacy—not even among the youth. According to the most recent data available from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-II) conducted during 1998–99, 70 per cent of the youth aged 15–29 years was reported to be literate (i.e., those born as recently as between 1970 and 1984). While 83 per cent of young men were literate, the figure among young women was only 59 per cent. In rural areas, only about half of the women aged 15–29 years were reported to be illiterate (International Institute for Population Sciences 2000: 28).

From time to time, the Indian government initiated several programmes, including adopting a mission mode, in order to spread literacy rapidly. The impact of these programmes has rarely been evaluated with rigour and the programmes have tended to either continue indefinitely or fizzle out. The more recent programme, designed to improve access to primary education and to increase children's participation in schooling, is the DPEP. It was launched in 1994 in 42 districts, where it has now been in operation for nearly seven years.¹ In order to understand the DPEP in a wider perspective and in the context of the prevailing situation in the country and our expectations from this initiative, we need to critically examine the path we have travelled towards our goal of universalising access to primary education, and the obstacles and barriers that have blocked us along the way. It is also important to understand the functioning and the reach of DPEP in order to assess the extent to which it has fulfilled its stated goals. Whether DPEP has been able to reach the disadvantaged segments of society and girls needs to be looked at in the context of what the literacy status of these groups was at the initiation of the programme. We also need to examine whether in the districts where DPEP came into existence in 1994, participation, and not mere enrolment, of girls and children of SCs and STs in primary education has increased.

To do this, data on enrolment, access, retention, participation and attendance from various sources has been pooled and examined as a backdrop to this review. A comprehensive review of all the relevant information is also a valuable input into the formulation of a realistic and effective programme towards reaching the goal of universalisation of literacy. Along with a critical examination of the information collected and compiled by the school system from school registers, national-level household data collected by organisations such as the National Sample Survey (NSS) and National Family Health Survey (NFHS) has also been presented. These surveys and the Indian Census collect information directly from the parents on the educational status of their children and

help us assess the validity and reliability of the 'service statistics' collected by the official machinery. The exercise can be expected to point to the gaps in attaining the national goal of universalising primary education, and identifying groups that are yet unreached.

DATA AND ITS SOURCES

The data in this section is illustrated through six tables in the text and 14 tables in the appendix to this chapter.

INDIAN CENSUSES

The data used for the analysis comes from several sources. The 1981 and 1991 population censuses as well as the preliminary results from the Census for the year 2001 give information, separately for males and females, about literacy of the population at a disaggregated level up to district level.² For the first time in the 1981 Census a question was put to all the respondents, including those who were reported as illiterate, specifically asking if they were attending school/college at the time of the enumeration. The respondents who reported all the other information about household members also provided the information about literacy or education of all members of the household.³ The school attendance question was also asked in the two subsequent Censuses of 1991 and 2001. The 2001 Census data on school attendance will take some time to become available. The Indian Census, however, has also been publishing data on literacy, the level of education and school attendance separately for the SC and ST population. (The 1991 Census and the 2001 Census present literacy rates for the population aged seven and above. However, since such adjustment is not possible with data from the NSS, in order to derive the time trend we have calculated crude literacy rates for the census period based on total population figures.)

NATIONAL FAMILY HEALTH SURVEYS

The other main source of information on education for the 1990 decade is the household-level data from the two NFHSs conducted in 1992-93 and more recently in 1998-99. The questions on educational attainment pertain to the entire population surveyed. Apart from collecting information on educational attainment, NFHSs have also included a question

for all children up to the age of 17 years, as to whether they were attending any educational institute at the time of the survey. In addition, the NFHS-II has also collected information on the reasons for either not attending school or for dropping out, depending upon the educational status that was reported. This information is tabulated separately for boys and girls in rural and urban areas, but is not tabulated for various social groups. Also, the NFHSs do not present education data at the district level.

NATIONAL SAMPLE SURVEYS

The five-yearly surveys of the National Sample Survey (NSS) organisation on employment and unemployment and the pattern of consumption also collect information on educational attainment of the population, school attendance and reasons for not attending school. In addition, information on education has been collected in the 'social consumption' rounds of the NSS. The information on education is available for the two periods of 1983 and 1987-88 between the two decennial data sets for 1981 and 1991. For the decade of the 1990s, the NSS estimates are available for the year 1993-94. Data is tabulated separately for boys and girls for all the major states but the information on social groups (SCs and STs) is not uniformly available from the NSS.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Since the time planning was initiated in the 1950s, India has been collecting statistics on children enrolled in various educational institutions. The information has been available for nearly 50 years. The Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) compiles statistics on the number of children enrolled in different categories of educational institutes, the number that repeat the class and the number that drop out. These statistics are essentially 'service statistics' and are collected from records maintained by various categories of educational institutions. The gross numbers are converted into ratios by using population estimates in the denominator of the age-groups appropriate for those particular classes or standards. Since the data for the numerator and the denominator come from different sources, the ratios have to be interpreted with caution. A ratio greater than unity is likely when the children enrolled in a given standard are older and/or younger than the age considered appropriate for that standard.

In addition, NCERT brings out Education Survey Reports from time to time. These surveys are not independent sources of information but compile data that is provided by the school authorities. As a result, the enrolment data reported by the Department of Education and by the NCERT in their education surveys is nearly the same in a number of states. The last in the series of NCERT surveys is the Sixth All-India Educational Survey for the year 1993. Information was collected, on a sample basis, on all types of educational facilities and teachers in the entire country. The survey has created a valuable database on issues such as the number of villages with and without primary schools, secondary schools, etc. However, these statistics are based on the presence or absence of a facility and do not throw any light on whether the schools are actually functioning, teachers come to schools regularly or whether there is a correlation between the number of children on the school register and the number that actually attend school on a more or less regular basis. For any programme to be effective, both in terms of the cost and investment in manpower and for any statistics to be realistic, such information must be compared with the household-survey data.

Furthermore, since its inception DPEP launched its DISE to generate data on school enrolment, retention and participation with special focus on girls and the disadvantaged communities for the districts in which the programmes have been launched. This is a definite improvement in the information generated by the Department of Education's existing database. In the early years, the data was compiled from the school registers and focused on enrolment. Currently, the DISE seeks to record detailed information on the school facilities, access, enrolment and retention. A large volume of data has been generated for the DPEP districts and the programme. However, there is hardly any critical reflection on issues that determine class transitions or primary school completion rates. The complex social and gender equity issues that frame primary education are hardly addressed, especially those relating to household decision-making on education, nor is data that is generated concomitantly disaggregated by gender as well as social groupings. Household surveys carried out by certain states on their own initiative are helpful in highlighting the social and gender equity dimensions framing access, enrolment, retention and achievements in primary schooling. However these surveys do not follow universal guidelines, and when available, do not permit comparisons across states.

Taken together, the vast quantities of data that have been generated provide a fairly good idea about the current educational scene and progress made towards universalising primary education in India. Wherever possible, we have compiled and examined data for the two decades of 1980s and 1990s. As a part of this review, we have critically examined the available information to understand whether the DPEP programme has succeeded. We have questioned the extent of its success in universalising access to primary education for children by retaining them in the school system and thereby reducing both the dropout rate and improving their learning achievements.

The literacy rates for the disadvantaged social groups are examined separately. We will focus only on the DPEP-I districts since the programme in these districts is almost seven years old and can expect to point to some concrete and lasting achievements. DPEP-II districts have not been covered because in many areas they are just about four years old and this is indeed too short a time to make any meaningful assessment of impact, except of course at the level of real enrolment.

SURVEY OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN UNDER THE AEGIS OF DPEP

The education departments of a few states, namely Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have conducted house-to-house surveys to estimate the number of out-of-school children. While Madhya Pradesh conducted such surveys twice in 1996 and 2000 (Lok Sampark Abhiyan), the other states, including Chhattisgarh, conducted the survey once. The states, however, used different definitions of who is an 'out-of-school' child. For example, Andhra Pradesh included children who attended school irregularly (with less than 50 per cent attendance) among the out-of-school children. Madhya Pradesh included only those children who did not attend school at all, even though they may have been formally enrolled. Further, the quality of data may be somewhat difficult to assess because they were collected by the teachers themselves in the schools and not by an independent agency. If the teachers had any vested interest in reporting one kind of situation as against another, the estimates may not reflect reality. With the exception of Karnataka, the data is not disaggregated by social group, caste or economic status.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the information from the surveys is examined to understand the situation on the ground.

DPEP INITIATIVE

DPEP was launched in 1994 with the objective of providing literacy to those who could not be brought into the mainstream—girls and those belonging to disadvantaged groups. It was targeted at predominantly those districts where rural female literacy was below the national average of 39 per cent in 1991. In fact, the 1991 Census figures revealed that rural female literacy was below 20 per cent in 73 districts in the country and 66 of these districts were in the four states of Uttar Pradesh (19), Rajasthan (19), Bihar (18) and Madhya Pradesh (10). In the first phase of DPEP, when the programme was launched in 42 districts, rather than covering a majority of these educationally very backward districts, only six districts were included, and all of them belonged to Madhya Pradesh. The first phase was not launched in the other three states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar.⁴ In fact, in 21 out of 42 districts DPEP selected, female literacy was above 30 per cent and they were in states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Assam. Evidently, in all the districts (and the states as well) where the literacy level is low, the educational machinery is inadequate or tardy, and schooling is of poor quality. In cases where children from weaker communities suffer from many disadvantages, the bureaucracy is evidently not able to gear up quickly enough even to avail of the funds earmarked for special programmes. The better-developed states, however, responded to the call to remove disparities between their districts.

Two tables have been compiled from secondary data sources for the districts where DPEP was launched in the first phase in or around 1994. It is evident that the districts selected for the programme were educationally backward even within their states. Except for the districts of Kerala, the crude literacy rate for females was below 40 per cent in all the districts as shown in Appendix Table 2.7. However, this is not to say that these districts were necessarily the most backward in the state. By 2001, a significant improvement in literacy rate was observed in all the districts, a trend that is observed throughout the country.⁵

An effort was made to compile information from the 1981 and 1991 Censuses on the percentage of children aged 6–10 years, belonging to SCs and STs, who were reported to be attending school in the DPEP-I

districts. The estimates are given in Appendix Table 2.8. It is evident that there are large inter-district variations within each state in the proportion of children attending school. The inter-state variations are also striking. A relatively higher proportion of SC children was reported to be attending school in Assam, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu compared to Madhya Pradesh, where even in 1991, less than 20 per cent of SC children were attending school in 10 out of 15 districts. The situation of the ST girls was much worse. Tamil Nadu seems to have succeeded in bringing the SC but not the ST children to school.

Since the major objectives of DPEP are achieving gender and social equity, its strategies and interventions are tailored to address the special needs of disadvantaged groups. However, the interventions and initiatives of DPEP are largely data driven, with an expectation that the database created during the course of the programme can be used for activities such as perspective planning, monitoring of project activities and providing decision-support services to educational administrators at all levels. For the selected districts, the programme has been generating time-series data on enrolment of girls along with boys, and for girls belonging to SC/ST communities. The achievements are measured in terms of percentage of girls to total enrolment and percentage of SC and ST girls to total enrolment among these social groups. An increase in the share of girls' enrolment over time is interpreted as a positive factor towards attaining gender equity. Further, an increase in enrolment is interpreted as indicative of a positive impact of DPEP interventions and a decline is viewed as a cause for concern.

TABLE 2.1
Crude literacy rates, by sex and residence, India, 1981–2001

Year	Source	Males			Females		
		Rural	Urban	All areas	Rural	Urban	All areas
1981	Census (all ages)	49.6	76.7	56.4	21.7	56.3	29.7
1987–88	NSS	48.4	72.3	–	25.9	55.9	–
1991	Census (all ages)	57.8	81.1	64.1	30.6	64.1	39.3
1992–93	NFHS-I	62.9	84.1	68.8	34.5	67.5	43.3
1993–94	NSS	63.7	85.3	74.5	36.6	68.7	52.7
1998–99	NFHS-II	69.5	87.5	74.5	43.7	72.2	51.4
2001	Census (all ages)	–	–	64.1	–	–	45.8
2001	Census (7+ age)	–	–	76.0	–	–	52.9

Source: Census 1981, 1991, 2001; NSSO 43rd, 50th Rounds and NFHS-I and II.⁶

As evident in Table 2.1, there has been a steady rise in literacy rates in the last two decades. The literacy rates of 76 per cent for males and 53 per cent for females based on the recent Census for 2001, while suggesting a remarkable improvement in the past decade, also points to the fact that the Indian population has older cohorts among whom illiteracy has been quite high. Efforts to address this through adult literacy missions and campaigns do not seem to have made much impact on eradicating illiteracy among the population in the 15–34 age-group. It so appears that India's huge illiterate population will reduce only with the passage of time as these cohorts complete their lifespan.

ENROLMENT AND ATTENDANCE

According to the 1993 Educational Survey, the effort to provide schools through the length and breadth of the country has led to some remarkable achievements. Indications are that 83 per cent of habitations (villages and their hamlets) and 94 per cent of the population have a primary school within a distance of 1 kilometre. The criticism that a sizeable proportion of rural schools are single-teacher schools notwithstanding, the enrolment statistics compiled by the Department of Education suggest that enrolment at the primary level has become universal for boys and girls are not lagging far behind. Near or total universalisation of school enrolment is reported by all the states of India.⁷ Unfortunately, enrolment statistics are compiled from school registers through official sources and are not generally checked directly for their accuracy or validity. Nor do they reflect actual attendance or participation.⁸ Enrolment data of DPEP-I districts show near absence of gender disparities in many states. This cannot be said for DPEP-II districts, which have a long way to go.⁹ States such as Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh as shown in Table 2.2 reveal persistent gender gaps. Alternative data sources such as NSSO and NFHS also reveal persistent gender disparities in almost all the regions of the country.

In the 52nd round of the NSS, conducted in 1995–96, the respondents of all the households were asked whether their children aged 6–14 years were currently enrolled in school. The comparison of what was reported by the NSS with the corresponding enrolment figures published by official sources point to a discrepancy of a sizeable magnitude. As opposed to the official statistics (GOI 1997) of 9 per cent boys and 82 per cent girls, aged 6–10 years, reported as enrolled in school, NSS reported the enrolment to be 80 per cent among boys and 68 per cent among girls. There can be

TABLE 2.2
Actual gender gap in enrolment

State	% female in the state based on sex ratio (1991)	% female in the state based on sex ratio (2001)	Girls' enrolment 1999–2001 (%)	Gender gap in enrolment 1999–2001 (% points)	Actual gender gap in enrolment (% points)
Assam	48	48	48	4	Nil
Bihar	48	48	42	16	12
Gujarat	48	48	43	14	10
Haryana	46	46	47	6	–1
Himachal Pradesh	49	49	49	2	Nil
Kerala	51	51	49	2	4
Madhya Pradesh	48	48	45	10	6
Maharashtra	48	48	48	4	Nil
Orissa	49	49	47	6	4
Tamil Nadu	49	50	49	2	2
Uttar Pradesh	47	47	42	16	10

Source: DPEP, *District Primary Education Programme Part 1*, 13th Joint Review Mission; (April–May 2001).

several reasons for this difference, ranging from perception of parents to inclusion of overage and underage children in the primary classes as well as actual falsification of statistics. The government of Madhya Pradesh conducted a Lok Sampark Abhiyan (LSA) in 1996 to collect information on the status of primary education in 34 districts of the state by conducting a household survey and found that 78 per cent of boys and 67 per cent of girls were enrolled in primary schools as against more than 100 per cent enrolment estimated in the data compiled by the education department (Government of Madhya Pradesh 2000). Clearly, there is a divergence between official statistics and what is reported in a household survey on school enrolment estimates (see Appendix Table 2.10). Similarly, recent data on out-of-school children in Andhra Pradesh reveals that many more girls are not in school; even in a relatively forward district such as Nellore, 26.5 per cent children in the 5–14 age-group were reported to be not attending school, over 55 per cent of them being girls (see Appendix Table 2.12).

Another way to validate the enrolment statistics is by comparing them with the actual attendance of children in school as reported by the parents (or children themselves in some cases). Assuming that the latter is closer to the truth than the information compiled from the attendance registers of schools, it is observed that school attendance has never been able to reach near the universal level. According to the 1991 Census, 45 per

cent of all girls and only 39 per cent of rural girls aged 6–10 years were reported to be attending school (see Appendix Table 2.3).

The 1990s have certainly witnessed a major achievement in school attendance, as is evident in Table 2.3 and as shown in Appendix Table 2.3.¹⁰ And yet we have a long way to go. A similar picture emerges when we look at the NFHS data on median years of schooling for the age-group 10–14 years disaggregated by region, residence and sex (see Appendix Table 2.13). First, as compared to the all-India figures of 4.7 per cent (M), 4.1 per cent (F) for rural areas and 5.7 per cent for both male and female in urban areas, states such as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan

TABLE 2.3
Percentage of the de facto household population attending school,
by sex, residence and state, age 6–14 years, 1992–93 and 1997–98

State	NFHS 1992–93				NFHS 1998–99			
	6–10		11–14		6–10		11–14	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Male								
All India	86.2	71.4	84.2	73.4	91.7	83.2	85.1	78.5
Madhya Pradesh	83.9	61.0	85.9	69.7	92.8	80.1	86.6	75.4
Karnataka	87.6	76.4	80.1	67.2	94.3	84.8	81.3	72.2
Orissa	89.7	75.8	86.2	72.9	85.2	85.4	78.3	79.9
Tamil Nadu	94.4	90.8	78.5	77.7	96.4	95.5	87.6	83.3
Andhra Pradesh	86.0	68.9	83.4	63.5	94.4	86.3	77.0	68.8
Uttar Pradesh	77.3	69.5	76.8	75.1	87.1	83.0	81.3	80.4
Bihar	83.0	57.0	86.2	64.9	81.0	68.0	78.6	71.6
Rajasthan	82.5	69.9	87.0	75.2	88.5	87.4	88.9	82.8
Haryana	91.9	85.9	89.3	85.8	92.7	92.5	90.9	88.3
Gujarat	89.8	78.9	88.4	78.7	91.4	83.9	87.2	73.9
Female								
All India	81.8	55.0	75.7	47.9	89.1	75.1	82.8	61.6
Madhya Pradesh	81.7	47.3	81.4	44.5	87.8	73.9	80.0	54.9
Karnataka	85.4	64.8	72.5	46.4	93.0	81.9	82.9	60.7
Orissa	78.8	63.0	78.2	52.5	82.7	81.0	77.0	64.8
Tamil Nadu	94.7	83.6	75.7	62.8	98.0	94.5	87.1	76.3
Andhra Pradesh	82.0	51.9	67.7	37.1	93.8	79.3	79.1	47.0
Uttar Pradesh	70.3	45.4	68.4	38.2	83.3	71.4	80.0	57.1
Bihar	69.3	34.0	65.6	33.0	72.1	53.0	78.2	48.7
Rajasthan	72.4	36.4	71.2	28.6	82.7	66.0	75.5	44.9
Haryana	89.9	71.9	87.3	65.8	92.0	89.3	86.8	77.3
Gujarat	84.4	64.0	78.4	57.9	90.0	74.9	76.5	54.8

Source: NFHS-I and II state and all-India reports, compiled by Shomo Srivastava.¹¹

lag behind substantially. Second, urban figures as compared to rural figures reveal a happier situation. What still remains alarming is that the gender gap in both urban and rural areas remains unacceptably high, with the situation being worse in rural areas.

The overall figures also mask an important fact—that the spread of education is very uneven. Not only are the urban areas at an advantage over rural areas, but also within the rural areas (and to a certain extent in urban areas as well) certain segments of society, such as those which belong to STs and other economically and socially backward groups, have lagged behind. Before we examine the available data on the disadvantaged groups, it is important to understand the reasons underlying non-attendance of school by children.

REASONS FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

Both the NSS and the NFHS-II have collected information on reasons for non-attendance in school by children. Although this information is not available separately for social groups, the data does throw some light on why some children never attend school and why some drop out. The reasons differ between boys and girls and between rural and urban children. According to the NFHS-II (which has clubbed children aged 6 to 17 years), overall, 15 per cent of boys and 22 per cent of girls were not attending school at the time of the survey as shown in Appendix Table 2.4. The high cost of providing education and the lack of interest in studies were given as reasons for nearly 50 per cent of boys in both rural and urban areas for having never attended school. For girls, along with the cost of education, their usefulness and help for the work at home were given as reasons for non-attendance. Education was perceived as unnecessary for girls in the case of nearly 13 per cent. For children who dropped out of school, the major reasons were lack of interest in studies and their being needed for work at home or outside for cash or kind. The analysis in this paragraph pertains to Table 2.4 as well as Appendix Table 2.4.

These three predominant reasons have to be explored in a wider context. Even though schooling is free, especially in rural areas, there are hidden costs of schooling. Children have to be reasonably well dressed for school. There are costs of books and other materials needed for studies. Lack of interest in studies can stem from a number of reasons, ranging from the home environment not being very conducive for pursuing studies

TABLE 2.4
Reasons for never attending or dropping out of school,
children aged 6–17 years, NFHS-II, 1998–99

Reasons	Males		Females	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Never attended school				
%	6.4	13.6	9.0	25.7
School far away	1.5	4.4	3.4	5.2
Education not necessary	6.1	7.8	12.9	13.1
Required for work at home				
or outside for cash/kind	12.6	17.1	15.4	24.5
Costs too much	28.5	25.8	30.1	23.8
Not interested in studies	26.5	25.7	15.7	15.9
Other	26.5	17.0	19.7	15.4
Don't know	3.0	2.0	2.8	2.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Dropped out of school				
%	10.6	10.6	11.0	12.6
School far away	0.3	1.4	1.2	7.5
Education not necessary	2.4	2.3	5.4	4.3
Required for work at home				
or outside for cash/kind	21.9	28.4	20.8	26.2
Costs too much	15.2	13.3	17.0	11.4
Not interested in studies	42.5	40.0	30.2	24.8
Repeated failures	6.0	5.3	6.1	3.7
Other*	5.9	5.5	14.3	18.2
Don't know	5.7	3.8	5.1	4.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: International Institute for Population Sciences, 2000, *India, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-II)*, 1998–99, Mumbai, pp. 33–35.

Note: * In the case of girls, this category also includes reasons such as lack of proper school facilities for girls and marriage among those who dropped out.

to schools lacking facilities, teachers being irregular and low social status of some of the children and their families within the community, thus leading to harassment in school, etc. As far as work is concerned, the argument can be circuitous. It is likely that when children drop out of school, they are engaged in some useful activity around the home. Equally likely is the possibility that they drop out because they are needed to contribute to the household income. In the case of rural girls, a small percentage also reported lack of proper school facilities and marriage as reasons for girls dropping out of schools.

LITERACY AND SCHOOL PARTICIPATION AMONG DISADVANTAGED SOCIAL GROUPS

Both the censuses and the NSS do provide some data on the educational status of the population belonging to the SCs and STs. As shown in Appendix Table 2.5, crude literacy rates among both men and women belonging to the disadvantaged social groups were indeed significantly lower compared to that for the total population. The spread of literacy among the ST population has been very limited compared to that among the SC population. Between 1981 and 1991, the crude literacy rate among SCs increased from 31 per cent and 11 per cent to 50 per cent and 24 per cent among males and females respectively. The 1981 literacy levels among the ST males and females were as low as 24 per cent and 8 per cent respectively and in 1991 they increased to 41 per cent and 18 per cent respectively. Clearly, women belonging to the tribal communities in India are a long way off from universal literacy.

The difference between crude literacy rates among various social groups is also reflected in the school attendance of children. The data available from the 1981 and 1991 Censuses clearly points out that throughout India, school attendance among children aged 6–10 years, belonging to disadvantaged groups, is significantly low compared to the total population. State-level data on school attendance is presented separately for children belonging to SC and ST communities in Appendix Table 2.6. According to the 1991 Census, less than 50 per cent of SC male children aged 6–10 years in rural areas were reported to be attending school in the four large north Indian states (Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh)¹² as well as in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. Among the SC girls residing in rural areas, the proportion attending school was less than 50 per cent in all the states except for Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

The population of both SCs and STs is unevenly distributed among the states of India. Nearly 60 per cent of all SC children of school-going age 6–10 years are estimated to be residing in the six states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. In these states, less than 50 per cent of SC male children and less than 40 per cent of female children were reported to be attending school. It is likely that children belonging to backward communities in rural areas enter school at a somewhat later age as compared to high-caste groups. Therefore, the proportion of 6-year-olds who have not yet started school

may be higher among them. However, the stark difference between backward groups and the others cannot be explained by this phenomenon alone.

Among the ST children, the proportion attending school is even more dismal as is evident in Appendix Table 2.6. In addition to the six states where less than 50 per cent children attended primary school among SCs, in the two additional states of Assam and Maharashtra school attendance was less than 50 per cent among the ST male children and below 30 per cent among female children. Tribal children of these states constitute 69 per cent of all tribal children in India. Given the factor of a secular increase in literacy, it is likely that the educational attainments of SC and ST children have also improved between 1991 and 2001, but recent data is not yet available. NSS data on out-of-school children reveals that the percentage of those who never attended is small, while the percentage of those who have dropped out is alarming (see Table 2.5). This is particularly so among rural girls from SC/ST communities—48.4 per cent SC girls and 55.9 per cent ST girls in the 5–9 age group and 51.6 per cent SC and 55.8 per cent ST girls in the 10–14 age group have dropped out of school.

Similar findings regarding social and gender disparities in access and retention in primary schooling are also reiterated by Aggarwal (2001) in his recent analytical report on the performance of DPEP districts. In particular, Aggarwal highlights the case of Karnataka where the social equity index for seven districts with more than 5 per cent SC population is stagnating at less than 75 on the equity index. According to him efforts should be made to tackle this by proactively identifying SC-concentrated areas that do not have adequate access to primary education.

It is evident that without sustained efforts, it will not be easy to break the culture of pulling girls out or not sending them to school at all. This drives home the need for context-specific innovative programmes to bring these children into the mainstream and to make schooling attractive for them and worthwhile for their parents. The model of alternative schools under the Education Guarantee Scheme of Madhya Pradesh appears to be one answer that ensures education to all and is spreading literacy rapidly among the disadvantaged groups. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

While enrolment data is available, community disaggregated data on attendance is not available in the data generated under DPEP. A recent survey of out-of-school children in Karnataka reveals persistence of disparities, especially in the more backward regions of the state (see Appendix

TABLE 2.5
All India: Percentage of out-of-school
children, age 5–14 years, 1993–94

Social group	Dropped out			Never attended		
	5–9	10–14	5–14	5–9	10–14	5–14
Rural male						
SC	36.1	28.5	32.7	4.0	2.9	3.5
ST	42.5	35.8	39.4	3.2	3.1	3.1
Others	26.8	18.2	22.6	3.7	2.7	3.2
All	30.4	22.0	26.4	3.7	2.8	3.3
Urban male						
SC	24.9	15.1	20.1	2.1	3.4	2.7
ST	19.3	17.1	18.3	3.4	3.2	3.3
Others	12.3	11.2	11.8	2.6	1.9	2.2
All	14.4	11.9	13.2	2.5	2.1	2.3
Rural female						
SC	48.4	51.6	49.9	4.3	4.1	4.2
ST	55.9	55.8	55.9	4.0	3.2	3.7
Others	35.6	36.4	36.0	3.9	3.4	3.7
All	40.5	41.3	40.8	4.0	3.5	3.8
Urban female						
SC	29.0	28.0	28.5	3.1	3.2	3.2
ST	30.8	21.1	25.9	5.2	4.6	4.9
Others	15.1	14.7	14.9	2.9	2.8	2.8
All	17.6	16.6	17.1	3.0	2.9	3.0

Source: *Economic Activities and School Attendance by Children of India*, Fifth Quinquennial Survey, NSS 50th Round, 1993–94, Report No. 412, National Sample Survey Organisation, Department of Statistics, Government of India, May 1997.

Table 2.11). In almost all the districts, the percentage of SC/ST children, and, among them, girls out-of-school is larger than in the general population. The percentage of out-of-school boys is 10.5, 14.4 and 17.7 among general, SC and ST communities respectively. The situation among girls is worse, being 11.7 per cent, 16.8 per cent and 20.7 per cent among general, SC and ST girls respectively. More than one-fifth of tribal girls are not in school. With the exception of Kolar district, which has a significant SC population (see Appendix Table 2.11), almost all the other DPEP-I districts show wide disparities. For example, in Raichur and Koppal, 36 per cent and 30.6 per cent SC girls are not in school. Similarly, 42.4 per cent (Raichur) and 33.1 per cent (Koppal) ST girls in the 6–14 age-group are not attending school. These are alarming figures and in all probability, the picture is not very different in other parts of the country.

This picture was also captured in the Sixth Educational Survey done in 1993, as seen in Table 2.6 on pupil characteristics. Furthermore, the distribution of students attending government, private aided and private unaided schools also indicate widening social disparities. Even when children are attending school, there is a discernible pattern in the choice of school. (For a detailed discussion, please refer to Chapter 3 and the micro studies in this volume.)

TABLE 2.6
Pupil characteristics in government/local body,
private aided and private unaided schools

<i>Pupil characteristics</i>	<i>Govt/Local body</i>	<i>Private aided</i>	<i>Private unaided</i>
Primary level			
Proportion of female students	43.0	46.7	40.2
Proportion of SC/ST students	30.8	23.6	14.9
Proportion of rural students	83.6	47.3	24.0
Proportion of total enrolled students	80.8	10.6	8.6
Upper primary level			
Proportion of female students	38.8	41.9	37.2
Proportion of SC/ST students	23.6	19.3	15.6
Proportion of rural students	73.5	52.6	37.0
Proportion of total enrolled students	58.0	30.9	11.0

Source: NCERT 6th Educational Survey, 1993.

LIMITATIONS OF THE MEASURES
USED TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF DPEP

The two measures devised to assess the impact of DPEP are indices of gender and social equity (Aggarwal 2000a). The formulation of these measures is straightforward. The index of gender equity is measured in terms of the share of girls enrolled in a given class (say, primary-level classes of I to V) as a per cent of their share in the total population. Similarly, the index of social equity is measured in terms of the share of SC or ST enrolment in total enrolment as a per cent of their share in the total population. In other words, these indices inform us whether, and the extent to which, the girls and those belonging to the socially disadvantaged groups lag behind in schooling. An index of 100 implies that girls or the population groups are enrolled in school in the same proportion as their share in the total population. However, since these indices are

based on enrolment figures, they suffer from the same limitations as the enrolment statistics. To the extent that the numerator and the denominator do not correspond, there would be divergence in the estimates. Given the prevailing discriminatory norms that define school enrolment for girls and children who belong to socially marginal groups, it would be fair to state that both girls and those belonging to SC/ST groups would rank low on the indices.

Besides this, the equity indices do not throw any light on the overall enrolment of girls or children belonging to the disadvantaged social groups. For instance, the low enrolment of both boys and girls in a backward district may actually translate into unity or near unity on the gender equity index despite the fact that a much smaller proportion of children is enrolled in school.

Furthermore, the share of both girls and children belonging to SC/ST groups in government-run schools may be higher than their share in the total population. There is evidence that boys belonging to higher castes are sent to private schools even in rural areas. Thus, although the share of girls in the total population will remain unaffected, their share in schools may improve because boys are sent to private schools and to that extent the achievement can be exaggerated (as data is not available for private unrecognised schools).

Time-series household data and qualitative studies are required to examine the participation of various social and economic groups before and after the launch of DPEP. However, such data is not available. Surveys of out-of-school children done under the LSA in Madhya Pradesh—in 1996 and 2000—tell us more than the DPEP EMIS data. Unfortunately, unlike the data from Karnataka, the available data for Madhya Pradesh is not disaggregated by community. Socio-economic profiles of communities with a greater proportion of out-of-school children would be valuable and perhaps help administrators zero in on hard-to-reach pockets. Data on out-of-school children collected in Andhra Pradesh is also not disaggregated by caste/community and economic group. Uniformity/ comparability is hampered when there is no standardisation with respect to age-groups. For example, in Madhya Pradesh the 1996 data has been tabulated for the 5–14 age-group, whereas the 2000 data has been presented for the 6–14 age-group. Similarly, the Andhra Pradesh data is for the 6–11 and 11–14 age-groups, while the percentage of out-of-school children is calculated for the 5–15 age-group—which again is not disaggregated by gender or community.

Enormous amounts of data have been generated in the last five years on the achievements of the DPEP programme. However, most of the assessments are based on the enrolment data generated by the system. In order to realistically assess the achievements of DPEP, community-based studies that obtain information from the parents of the children as to whether they attend school regularly as well as observations of the schools that function will have to be conducted. Achievements should also be assessed in terms of attendance rather than in terms of enrolment in the school system. Reasons for dropping out or having never enrolled can be used as pointers to strengthen the programme.

RECAPTURING MAIN TRENDS

To reiterate, the main points emerging from the analysis of available data is as follows:

- The data from 1981 to 2001, more particularly in the last decade, reveals substantial progress in literacy, school enrolment and retention as also average years of schooling. Gaps, however, continue to exist between states, by place of residence, gender and social groupings. Evidently, the many programmes initiated by the government, in particular DPEP, have made a difference—especially with respect to spreading schooling among girls. However, we still have a long way to go.
- Different data sources display different infirmities making it difficult to present disaggregated data tables reflecting clear trends by gender and social groups. For this reason, available macro data needs to be supplemented with household-survey data and qualitative micro studies. The revised DISE proposed under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has incorporated household survey into the basket of information to be routinely collected.
- Across states/districts, the literacy rates of females, SCs and STs, though below national averages, are highly correlated with overall literacy rates, and inter-group disparities tend to decline as the average literacy rate increases. More literate states show a narrower gender and social gap.
- Statistics on school enrolment, particularly gross enrolment, need to be interpreted with caution. In particular, data collected from schools and the education department have displayed a tendency

for over-reporting. What we need instead are net enrolment, retention, transition and average years of schooling data disaggregated by gender, social groupings (within them by gender) and type of school to get a better grasp on the policies that are working and how effectively they are working.

- The above data must be read in conjunction with that on dropouts and those who never attended school. It is disturbing that despite improvement in enrolment rates, dropouts continue to remain high and the hardest to reach in both rural and urban areas. More specifically girls, SCs and STs still do not manage to access any form of schooling.
- Finally, since DPEP specifically targets girls and children who are from socially deprived backgrounds, it needs to refine its method of calculating both the gender and social equity gaps as a way of assessing its efficacy.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX TABLE 2.1
Literacy rates: All-India and major states, 2001

State	Male	Female	Male– Female Gap	Decadal increase: Male	Decadal increase: Female	Increase ranked in descending order	
						M	F
All India	75.96	54.28	21.68	11.83	15.00		
Andhra Pradesh	70.85	51.17	19.68	15.72	18.45	4	6
Assam	71.93	56.03	15.90	10.06	13.00	11	16
Bihar	60.32	33.57	26.75	8.95	11.58	16	17
Chhattisgarh	77.86	52.40	25.46	19.79	24.87	2	1
Gujarat	80.50	58.60	21.90	7.11	9.68	18	18
Goa	88.88	75.51	13.37	5.24	8.42	19	19
Haryana	79.25	56.31	22.94	10.16	15.84	10	8
Himachal Pradesh	86.02	68.08	17.94	10.61	15.82	9	9
Jammu and Kashmir	65.75	41.82	23.93	NA	NA	NA	NA
Jharkhand	67.94	39.38	28.57	12.14	13.86	7	11
Karnataka	76.29	57.45	18.84	9.03	13.12	15	15
Kerala	94.20	87.86	6.34	0.58	1.69	20	20
Madhya Pradesh	76.80	50.28	26.52	18.26	20.93	3	3
Maharashtra	86.27	67.51	18.75	9.71	15.20	14	10
Orissa	75.95	50.97	24.98	12.86	16.29	6	7
Punjab	75.63	63.55	12.08	9.97	13.14	12	14
Rajasthan	76.46	44.34	32.12	21.47	23.90	1	2
Tamil Nadu	82.33	64.55	17.78	8.58	13.22	17	13
Uttaranchal	84.01	60.26	23.75	11.22	18.63	8	4
Uttar Pradesh	70.23	42.98	27.25	15.40	18.61	5	5
West Bengal	77.58	60.22	17.35	9.77	13.66	13	12

Source: *Census of India, 2001*; Paper 1 of 2001—Provisional Population Totals, Series 1—India: Statement 35, p. 126.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.2
Crude literacy rate by sex and residence, India, 1981–2001

Year	Source	Males			Females		
		Rural	Urban	All areas	Rural	Urban	All areas
1981	Census	40.8	65.8	46.9	18.0	47.8	24.8
1983	NSS	45.0	69.5	NA	22.0	51.6	NA
1987–88	NSS	48.4	72.3	NA	25.9	55.9	NA
1991	Census	47.4	69.3	52.7	25.4	54.5	32.2
1992–93	NFHS-I	52.6	73.0	58.1	29.0	58.5	36.7
1993–94	NSS	54.5	75.9	65.2	32.1	61.6	46.8
1998–99	NFHS-II	58.8	77.0	63.7	37.3	63.7	44.2
2001	Census	–	–	64.1	–	–	45.8
% Increase between 1981–91		16.2	5.3	12.4	41.1	14.0	29.8
% Increase between 1991–2001				21.6			42.2

- Sources:** 1. NSS 43rd Round, 1991. *Employment and Unemployment in India, 1987–88*. Sarvekshna, Journal of the National Sample Survey Organisation, Dept. of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of India, Vol. XV, No. 2, Issue No. 49 (Oct/Dec).
2. NSSO, 1997. *Employment and Unemployment in India, 1993–94*. Report No. 409, Fifth Quinquennial Survey, NSS 50th Round (July 1993–June 1994), New Delhi.
3. International Institute for Population Sciences, 1995. *India, National Family Health Survey (NFHS), 1992–93*. Mumbai.
4. International Institute for Population Sciences, 2000. *India, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-II), 1998–99*. Mumbai.
5. Census 1981.
6. Census of India, 1991. Series-1, *India, Final Population Totals: Brief Analysis of Primary Census Abstract*, Paper-2 of 1992. Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India.
7. Census of India, 2001. *India, Provisional Population Totals*, Series-1, Paper-1 of 2001. Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.3
 Percentage of children aged 6–10 years by sex, enrolled in school,
 reported as literate and attending school, India, various years

Year	Source	Enrolled in school		Reported as literate		Attending school	
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
1981	Census						
	All areas	95.8	64.1	38.1	27.9	50.6	31.4
	Rural	NA	NA	33.2	21.6	38.3	25.1
1991	Census						
	All areas	112.8	86.9	65.2	51.9	56.6	45.4
	Rural	98.6	81.8	60.3	44.8	52.3	39.3
1992–93	NFHS-I						
	All areas	118.1	92.7	64.0	53.6	75.0	61.3
	Rural	NA	NA	59.8	47.1	71.4	55.0
1993–94	NSS (50th round)						
	All areas	115.3	92.9	68.5	62.1	75.0	67.8
	Rural	NA	NA	60.1	50.2	66.4	56.0
1995–96	NSS (52nd round)						
	All areas	98.6 (79.7)	81.8 (68.1)	–	–	73.0	63.0
	Rural	(75.8)	(63.0)	–	–	71.0	58.0
1998–99	NFHS-II						
	All areas	–	–	73.1	67.4	85.2	78.3
	Rural	–	–	70.0	63.6	83.2	75.1

- Sources:**
1. NSSO, 1997. *Employment and Unemployment in India, 1993–94*. Report No. 409. Fifth Quinquennial Survey, NSS Fiftieth Round (July 1993–June 1994), New Delhi.
 2. NSSO, 2000. 'A note on Attending an Educational Institution in India: Its Level, Nature and Cost', NSS 52nd Round (July 1995–June 1996), *Sarvekshana*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, Issue No. 82, January–March 2000.
 3. International Institute for Population Sciences, 1995, *India, National Family Health Survey (NFHS), 1992–93*, Mumbai.
 4. International Institute for Population Sciences, 2000, *India, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-II), 1998–99*, Mumbai.
 5. Census 1981.
 6. Census of India 1991, Series-1, *India, Final Population Totals: Brief Analysis of Primary Census Abstract*, Paper-2 of 1992, Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India.

- Notes:**
- The enrolment data is from the publications on *Education Statistics of the Department of Education*, Ministry of Human Resource Development.
 - The NFHS-I and II data refer to children aged 6–9 years.
 - For 1995–96, the figures in parentheses are the gross enrolment ratios estimated by the NSS.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.4
Percentage of household population attending
school by age, sex and residence, India, 1998-99

Age	Males		Females	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
6-10	91.7	83.2	89.1	75.1
11-14	85.1	78.5	82.8	61.6
15-17	65.3	54.8	60.5	32.8
6-17	83.0	75.8	80.0	61.7

Source: International Institute for Population Sciences, 2000, *India, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-II)*, 1998-99, Mumbai, pp. 33-35.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.5
Crude literacy rate among Scheduled
Castes and Tribes by sex, India, various years

Year	Source	Scheduled Castes		Scheduled Tribes		Others	
		Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
1981	Census						
	All areas	30.9	10.8	24.5	8.0	52.3	29.4
	Rural	27.9	8.5	22.9	6.8	46.1	21.7
1983	NSS						
	All areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	Rural	35.6	13.0	30.5	11.5	50.7	26.3
1987-88	NSS						
	All areas	47.5	24.6	46.7	28.2	-	-
	Rural	37.5	15.5	32.5	13.4	50.7	30.5
1991	Census						
	All areas	49.9	23.8	40.6	18.1	52.7	32.2
	Rural					47.4	25.4

- Sources:** 1. NSSO, 1990. *Employment Unemployment Situation of Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste Population During Late Eighties*, Report No. 371A, (38th and 43rd Rounds). New Delhi.
2. Census 1981.
3. Census of India 1991. Series 1, *India, and Final Population Totals: Brief Analysis of Primary Census Abstract*, Paper 2 of 1992, Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.6
 Percentage of children aged 6–10 years reported attending school,
 by sex and caste for major states of India, 1981 and 1991 censuses

State	Rural areas: Males					
	Scheduled Castes		Scheduled Tribes		All population	
	1981	1991	1981	1991	1981	1991
Andhra Pradesh	40.0	46.9	28.5	35.0	49.2	54.5
Assam	NC	55.0	NC	48.7	NC	47.0
Bihar	24.9	–	33.4	–	40.2	38.8
Gujarat	64.7	74.1	45.1	56.8	59.2	65.1
Haryana	44.0	52.4	NA	NA	56.8	64.7
Himachal Pradesh	63.7	72.6	58.4	71.2	73.7	78.4
Karnataka	42.7	53.8	42.6	53.4	53.4	63.1
Kerala	85.5	90.0	58.0	73.3	89.5	90.8
Madhya Pradesh	38.4	45.5	27.8	32.6	42.8	48.5
Maharashtra	57.8	66.0	43.3	46.8	65.5	69.6
Orissa	50.0	48.4	40.6	37.5	56.6	58.9
Punjab	54.4	58.1	NA	NA	65.2	66.5
Rajasthan	34.3	37.0	32.1	32.1	42.7	45.8
Tamil Nadu	58.8	75.3	39.0	50.0	70.6	78.3
Uttar Pradesh	33.0	–	42.0	–	41.1	41.5
West Bengal	37.0	33.1	28.9	28.3	45.6	44.7
All India	41.6		35.3		50.6	52.3
State	Rural areas: Females					
	Scheduled Castes		Scheduled Tribes		All population	
	1981	1991	1981	1991	1981	1991
Andhra Pradesh	23.9	29.8	13.6	17.6	30.6	39.6
Assam	NC	48.8	NC	43.3	NC	68.2
Bihar	5.7	–	15.1	–	18.5	22.1
Gujarat	45.0	62.2	28.9	42.2	41.6	52.4
Haryana	17.8	41.4	NA	NA	31.0	51.6
Himachal Pradesh	44.8	62.4	28.7	56.8	57.5	70.3
Karnataka	22.0	36.6	20.9	37.1	36.4	51.1
Kerala	83.6	89.4	51.4	71.0	88.6	90.7
Madhya Pradesh	13.2	27.1	9.6	20.4	18.6	34.3
Maharashtra	36.7	52.9	24.9	34.3	44.4	59.1
Orissa	25.6	35.6	18.1	22.6	36.1	45.7
Punjab	40.2	47.8	NA	NA	55.6	60.3
Rajasthan	4.4	9.7	4.3	7.7	11.5	18.9
Tamil Nadu	39.9	66.0	27.2	39.8	58.0	71.6
Uttar Pradesh	8.1	–	19.1	–	17.5	24.6
West Bengal	23.9	26.4	14.0	18.8	34.4	37.6
All India	20.5		17.3		31.4	39.3

APPENDIX TABLE 2.7
Crude literacy rate in DPEP phase-I districts by
sex according to 1991 and 2001 censuses

State/District	7+ Literacy rate, 1991		7+ Literacy rate, 2001		Percentage of population	
	All	Female	All	Female	SC	ST
Assam	52.9	43.0	64.0	56.0		
Dubri	38.3	28.8	49.9	42.6	3.8	4.1
Darrang	42.0	32.5	55.9	46.9	5.0	17.3
Marigaon	48.0	39.2	59.5	52.4	7.6	12.1
Karbi Anglong	45.6	34.3	58.8	48.7	4.2	51.6
Haryana	55.9	40.5	69.0	56.0		
Kaithal	42.6	32.1	59.5	47.6	21.4	–
Jind	47.0	30.1	62.8	49.0	19.0	–
Hisar	47.9	32.1	65.9	52.1	23.2	–
Sirsa	46.3	34.0	61.2	50.3	26.7	–
Karnataka	56.0	44.3	67.0	57.0		
Kolar	50.5	37.8	63.1	52.8	25.7	6.9
Mandya	48.1	36.7	61.2	51.6	13.8	0.7
Belgaum	53.0	38.7	64.4	52.5	11.4	2.3
Raichur	36.0	27.2	49.5	36.8	17.2	7.8
Kerala	89.8	86.2	91.0	88.0		
Kasaragode	82.5	76.3	85.2	79.8	7.6	2.7
Waynad	82.7	77.7	85.5	80.8	4.1	17.1
Malapuram	87.9	84.1	88.6	86.0	8.3	0.3
Madhya Pradesh	44.2	28.9	64.0	51.0		
Guna	34.6	18.0	59.9	43.1	18.1	12.0
Tikamgarh	34.8	20.0	55.8	41.0	22.8	4.1
Chhatarpur	35.2	21.3	53.4	39.4	23.7	3.8
Panna	33.7	19.4	61.6	47.8	20.4	14.9
Satna	44.7	27.8	65.1	51.4	17.8	13.8
Rewa	44.4	26.9	62.3	47.8	14.8	12.4
Shahdol	34.8	20.1	57.8	45.4	7.7	46.3
Sidhi	29.1	13.6	52.8	36.4	11.4	30.4
Mandsaur	48.7	28.3	70.7	54.9	15.9	4.8
Ratlam	44.2	29.1	67.7	54.7	13.7	23.3
Dhar	34.5	20.7	52.7	38.6	6.9	53.5
Rajgarh	31.8	15.6	54.0	37.4	18.0	3.3
Sehore	40.4	22.0	63.8	48.0	20.3	10.2
Raisen	40.8	25.5	72.8	61.9	16.6	14.4
Betul	45.9	33.9	66.9	56.1	10.8	37.5

(Appendix Table 2.7 contd)

(Appendix Table 2.7 contd)

State/District	7+ Literacy rate, 1991		7+ Literacy rate, 2001		Percentage of population	
	All	Female	All	Female	SC	ST
Chhattisgarh	—	—	—	—		
Surguja	30.1	17.4	55.4	42.2	5.5	53.7
Bilaspur	45.3	27.3	64.0	48.1	18.1	23.0
Raigarh	41.2	26.5	70.5	57.9	11.4	47.7
Rajnangaon	44.4	27.8	77.6	67.9	10.3	25.2
Maharashtra	64.9	52.3	77.0	68.0		
Aurangabad	57.0	39.6	73.6	61.3	13.8	3.8
Parbhani	47.6	29.4	67.0	53.0	11.0	5.3
Latur	55.6	39.7	72.3	60.3	16.3	1.8
Nanded	48.2	31.0	68.5	55.1	19.1	2.2
Osmanabad	54.3	39.4	70.2	57.6	18.1	11.8
Tamil Nadu	62.7	51.3	73.0	65.0		
South Arcot	52.9	39.7			36.4	2.0
Dharmapuri	46.0	34.2	59.2	49.1	15.1	NA
Villupuram	39.7	24.8	64.7	53.2	14.5	NA
Thiruvannamalai	39.3	30.5	68.2	56.3	27.1	1.2

Sources: Yash Aggarwal. *An Assessment of Trends in Access and Retention*, DPEP 2000. National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration. New Delhi.
Census of India. 2001. Series-1, India, Provisional Population Totals, Paper 1 of 2001, Supplement District Totals, Registrar General of India. New Delhi.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.8
 Percentage of children aged 6–10 years attending school
 among SC and ST populations, in DPEP phase I districts, 1981–91

State/District	Scheduled Caste				Scheduled Tribe			
	1981		1991		1981		1991	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Assam								
Dubri	NA	NA	46.4	36.4	NA	NA	49.4	48.6
Darrang	NA	NA	45.7	37.6	NA	NA	46.5	45.3
Marigaon	NA	NA	53.2	45.2	NA	NA	53.0	45.0
K. Anglong	NA	NA	44.2	34.0	NA	NA	38.3	31.9
Haryana								
Kaithal	27.4	14.4	39.2	25.3	NA	NA	NA	NA
Jind	29.4	7.0	43.7	31.1	NA	NA	NA	NA

(Appendix Table 2.8 contd)

State/District	Scheduled Caste				Scheduled Tribe			
	1981		1991		1981		1991	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Hisar	29.4	7.5	41.0	26.2	NA	NA	NA	NA
Sirsa	25.8	8.9	36.3	22.6	NA	NA	NA	NA
Karnataka								
Kolar	42.4	18.0	59.1	36.8	43.9	18.6	60.3	39.6
Mandya	50.4	29.4	65.1	50.8	42.3	23.7	51.7	42.7
Belgaum	53.2	29.6	56.3	39.0	NA	NA	55.0	31.5
Raichur			31.9	10.6	30.5	10.8	27.2	10.9
Kerala								
Kasaragode	66.1	61.6	77.1	75.6	68.3	59.2	84.8	84.8
Waynad	76.5	72.2	86.5	86.8	51.0	43.7	72.9	70.3
Malapuram	81.6	81.1	89.6	89.5	46.3	38.1	68.3	59.8
Madhya Pradesh								
Guna	23.2	3.9	31.1	12.3	8.5	1.0	12.5	4.0
Tikamgarh	36.2	7.4	36.5	23.0	13.5	2.9	22.8	16.5
Chhatarpur	28.4	5.1	34.7	18.1	12.3	1.4	18.7	8.9
Panna	28.2	4.6	30.2	15.8	14.5	2.7	21.5	12.8
Satna	35.6	5.4	41.8	19.5	16.2	2.4	21.8	9.1
Rewa	25.8	2.7	37.6	13.5	21.1	2.0	28.6	9.7
Shahdol	32.6	5.7	41.9	17.4	25.9	5.7	32.5	15.9
Sidhi	16.0	1.8	26.2	6.3	15.6	2.8	21.4	7.6
Mandsaur	42.9	8.5	51.5	25.9	17.0	2.5	30.8	14.6
Ratlam	30.1	5.4	41.6	18.3	17.8	3.2	22.5	10.0
Dhar	40.9	11.2	45.0	22.6	20.0	4.7	28.1	16.1
Rajgarh	25.2	3.1	35.6	14.9	21.3	2.3	41.1	17.2
Sehore	32.2	4.6	45.8	24.0	18.0	3.6	28.2	15.2
Raisen	24.8	6.5	32.1	17.7	15.6	3.1	24.2	12.7
Betul	63.7	40.8	67.7	57.5	29.6	9.2	36.4	22.2
Chhattisgarh								
Surguja	30.4	10.7	37.3	21.2	29.4	10.3	34.2	21.8
Bilaspur	50.5	15.0	55.5	33.1	39.9	10.7	44.6	25.5
Raigarh	45.1	19.7	51.5	35.3	48.2	25.1	48.5	36.0
Rajnangaon	54.4	19.9	54.7	39.8	45.1	18.4	52.2	38.2
Maharashtra								
Aurangabad	49.5	17.1	57.4	38.2	35.0	10.7	39.0	20.5
Parbhani	43.6	13.6	51.8	31.1	43.2	13.3	51.2	29.2
Latur	44.0	15.2	67.0	49.7	41.5	15.6	68.2	46.1
Nanded	45.8	16.6	59.1	39.9	45.5	18.5	56.0	37.0
Osmanabad	58.7	27.9	68.7	52.5	53.3	25.1	57.4	36.3

(Appendix Table 2.8 contd)

(Appendix Table 2.8 contd)

State/District	Scheduled Caste				Scheduled Tribe			
	1981		1991		1981		1991	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Tamil Nadu								
South Arcot	53.5	32.4	67.6	54.1	32.7	19.5	38.4	27.9
Dharmapuri	52.6	29.5	71.8	60.9	40.2	25.4	53.4	44.5
Villupuram	53.5	32.4	67.6	54.1	32.7	19.5	38.4	27.9
Thiruvannamalai	65.0	52.6	75.0	64.4	30.9	18.5	46.2	32.8

- Notes:** 1. In Haryana, Karnal district was renamed as Kurukshetra before the 1981 Census and was renamed again as Kaithal before the 1991 Census.
2. In Kerala, Kasaragode was a part of Cannanore district in 1981. The 1981 figures refer to the undivided Cannanore district.
3. In Tamil Nadu, South Arcot district was bifurcated into Cuddalore and Villupuram districts and North Arcot district was divided into Vellore and Thiruvannamalai districts. The 1981 figures refer to the undivided South and North Arcot districts.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.9

Percentage of households with no literate male/female member of age 15 years and above, according to NSS 50th round, 1993-94

Rural areas			Urban areas		
Household type	No literate male member	No literate female member	Household type	No literate male member	No literate female member
Self employed			Self employed	13.9	36.3
In agriculture	28.7	63.9			
In non-agriculture	27.5	59.6			
Agricultural labourer	54.3	81.1	Regular wage/Salaried	6.4	30.9
Other labour	36.0	67.7	Casual labour	34.3	65.5
Others	29.5	54.5	Others	23.6	56.4
All	37.0	67.8	All	14.3	39.7

Source: NSSO, 1997. *Employment and Unemployment in India, 1993-94*, Report No. 409. Fifth Quinquennial Survey, NSS 50th Round (July 1993-June 1994). New Delhi.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.10

Lok Sampark Abhiyan data from Madhya Pradesh, 1996 and 2000
Out-of-school children in age-group 5-14 (1996) and 6-14 years (2000)

District	1996 Out-of-school		1996 % Out-of-school		2000 Out-of-school		2000 % Out-of-school	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Madhya Pradesh	1,234,635	1,550,058	22.53	33.07	392,276	479,848	NA	NA
Betul	25,925	32,179	20.08	26.54	7,398	9,225	5.02	6.81
Raisen	13,492	15,207	13.06	17.20	3,845	4,190	3.97	5.18
Dhar	70,296	83,291	41.28	53.72	33,635	37,287	19.41	25.78
Shahdol	46,658	62,010	22.89	34.25	10,821	11,223	6.78	7.67
Mandsaur	24,643	36,152	15.85	27.79	4,118	5,619	3.84	6.44
Rewa	31,628	47,385	15.42	27.06	26,673	40,795	11.66	22.70
Tikamgarh	32,816	37,969	29.40	41.66	5,339	5,590	3.94	5.11
Chhatarpur	38,108	41,309	30.31	41.69	14,164	16,645	9.28	13.69
Guna	38,777	46,442	26.55	42.79	15,395	19,321	NA	NA
Panna	20,996	24,881	24.15	35.95	10,678	11,858	NA	NA
Shore	24,377	32,826	19.71	31.77	7,456	11,966	-	-

Source: Rajiv Shiksha Mission. *State Programme Action Report for XIIIth Joint Review Mission (22-28 April 2001)*, Rajya Shiksha Kendra Bhopal; *From Your School to Our School, Education Guarantee Scheme*, Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission, Government of Madhya Pradesh. India. 2000.

Note: For the year 1996 the data on out-of-school children is for the age-group 5-14 and it is 6-14 years for the year 2000.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.11
Karnataka 2001: Total children and the percentage of children
by general, SC and ST, out-of-school in the age-group 6-14 years

District	Total population 6-14			Out-of-school population 6-14			% Out-of-school population 6-14		
	General	SC	ST	General	SC	ST	General	SC	ST
Male									
Karnataka	4,811,853	1,013,134	381,000	506,481	145,503	67,384	10.53	14.36	17.69
Raichur	219,458	47,645	43,334	53,637	13,916	15,739	24.44	29.21	36.32
Koppal	131,840	23,093	17,091	27,017	6,316	4,765	20.49	27.35	27.88
Belgaum	388,843	46,355	25,133	30,190	4,233	3,570	7.76	9.13	14.20
Kolar	228,852	65,532	20,756	15,641	5,227	1,797	6.83	7.98	8.66
Mandya	144,929	21,506	8,703	7,773	1,493	882	5.36	6.94	10.13
Female									
Karnataka	4,667,318	978,534	370,685	547,263	164,260	76,758	11.73	16.79	20.71
Raichur	217,917	47,306	43,026	63,255	17,035	18,251	29.03	36.01	42.42
Koppal	130,253	22,810	16,880	31,119	6,975	5,578	23.89	30.58	33.05
Belgaum	374,842	44,683	24,224	34,336	5,130	5,073	9.16	11.48	14.20
Kolar	224,957	64,413	20,398	17,977	7,183	2,338	7.99	11.15	11.46
Mandya	141,735	21,029	8,506	7,082	1,407	926	5.00	6.69	10.89

Source: Survey of out-of-school children, DPEP, government of Karnataka. April 2001.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.12(a)
Andhra Pradesh: Out-of-school children in
age-group 6–11, 12–14 and 6–14 years, 2001

<i>District</i>	<i>6–11 years</i>		<i>12–14 years</i>		<i>6–14 years</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Andhra Pradesh*	367,313	421,797	363,837	443,778	781,150	865,575
Vizianagaram	14,567	12,841	14,167	13,509	28,734	26,350
Nellore	18,619	20,494	27,928	30,741	46,547	51,235
Kurnool	24,116	35,738	30,481	36,616	54,597	72,364
Karimnagar	14,340	16,431	12,779	17,827	27,119	34,258
Warangal	17,301	22,697	17,626	21,746	34,927	44,443

Source: DPEP Directorate, government of Andhra Pradesh. April 2001.

Note: *Grand total of 19 DPEP districts whereas the total number of districts in the state is 23.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.12(b)
Andhra Pradesh 2001: Total children and
percentage of children (5–14) out-of-school

<i>District</i>	<i>Total children</i>	<i>Out-of-school children</i>	<i>% Out-of-school children</i>
Andhra Pradesh*	10,806,342	1,596,725	14.8
Vizianagaram	423,736	55,084	13.0
Nellore	369,634	97,782	26.5†
Kurnool	684,497	126,953	18.5
Karimnagar	659,695	61,375	9.3
Warangal	632,255	79,370	12.6

Notes: *Grand total of 19 DPEP districts whereas the total number of districts in the state is 23. Gender disaggregated data for 5–4 years was not available.

† Assuming this data is accurate, this high rate is indeed surprising because Nellore is not only economically and educationally forward, but the total literacy campaign and subsequent women's self-help group movement was reported to have been very effective. It may be worthwhile to explore when children drop out and for what reasons. There is some anecdotal evidence of girls in the 11+ age-group engaged in economic work and shouldering greater household responsibilities, when their parents (especially mothers) are engaged in income-generating activities.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.13
Average no. of years of schooling, age 10-14 years, India and major states, 1998-99

State	All			Males			Females		
	% Illiterate	% Currently attending school (11-14 yrs)	Median no. of years of schooling	% Illiterate	% Currently attending school (11-14 yrs)	Median no. of years of schooling	% Illiterate	% Currently attending school (11-14 yrs)	Median no. of years of schooling
All areas									
All India	18.2	73.9	4.8	13.0	80.2	5.0	23.9	67.0	4.6
Andhra Pradesh	21.2	62.8	5.2	15.7	71.0	5.5	26.5	54.6	5.0
Bihar	35.3	62.7	3.1	26.4	72.4	3.7	44.6	52.6	2.3
Gujarat	20.4	71.6	5.3	15.4	79.4	5.5	25.6	63.1	5.1
Haryana	7.7	84.7	5.1	4.7	89.1	5.2	10.9	80.0	4.9
Karnataka	15.5	71.6	5.7	12.9	75.2	5.8	18.2	68.0	5.7
Kerala	0.8	96.9	6.9	1.4	96.9	6.7	0.4	96.8	7.1
Madhya Pradesh	20.6	69.9	4.4	15.2	78.5	4.6	26.3	61.1	4.1
Orissa	16.7	73.3	5.1	11.4	79.7	5.3	22.7	66.1	4.7
Punjab	7.4	87.2	5.2	6.4	89.1	5.0	8.6	84.9	5.3
Rajasthan	21.7	69.7	4.3	10.0	84.3	4.9	35.3	52.7	3.2
Tamil Nadu	6.8	82.3	6.2	4.9	84.8	6.4	6.2	79.6	6.2
Uttar Pradesh	21.1	72.3	3.9	14.0	80.6	4.3	29.5	62.4	3.3
West Bengal	17.2	72.2	3.8	12.9	75.4	3.9	21.9	68.7	3.7

Rural areas

All India	21.5	70.4	4.5	15.0	78.5	4.7	28.6	61.6	4.1
Andhra Pradesh	25.4	57.6	4.9	17.8	68.8	5.3	32.5	47.0	4.3
Bihar	37.9	60.4	2.9	27.8	71.6	3.5	48.5	48.7	1.8
Gujarat	26.6	64.5	4.7	20.3	73.9	5.0	33.1	54.8	4.4
Haryana	8.7	83.0	4.9	5.0	88.3	5.1	12.5	77.3	4.5
Karnataka	19.4	66.4	5.5	15.6	72.2	5.6	23.3	60.7	5.4
Kerala	0.9	96.2	6.8	1.7	96.2	6.6	0.2	96.3	7.0
Madhya Pradesh	24.7	65.0	4.1	18.4	75.4	4.3	31.1	54.9	3.6
Orissa	17.6	72.7	5.0	11.8	79.9	5.3	24.0	64.8	4.5
Punjab	10.1	83.7	4.9	8.4	87.0	4.9	12.1	79.6	5.0
Rajasthan	25.4	65.2	3.9	10.8	82.8	4.8	42.1	44.9	2.4
Tamil Nadu	7.8	79.8	6.1	5.6	83.3	6.1	10.1	76.3	6.1
Uttar Pradesh	23.6	69.9	3.5	15.3	80.4	4.1	33.4	57.1	2.8
West Bengal	19.2	71.0	3.5	14.1	74.6	3.7	25.1	66.9	3.2

Urban areas

All India	8.2	84.0	5.7	7.0	85.1	5.7	9.6	82.8	5.7
Andhra Pradesh	8.3	78.0	6.1	9.9	77.0	6.0	6.6	79.1	6.2
Bihar	17.0	78.4	5.0	15.9	78.6	5.0	18.1	78.2	4.9
Gujarat	10.7	82.2	6.0	8.1	87.2	6.0	13.5	76.5	5.9
Haryana	5.1	89.0	5.6	4.0	90.9	5.5	6.4	86.8	5.6
Karnataka	7.3	82.1	6.2	7.0	81.3	6.3	7.7	82.9	6.2

(Appendix Table 2.13 contd)

(Appendix Table 2.13 contd)

State	All			Males			Females		
	% Illiterate	% Currently attending school (11-14 yrs)	Median no. of years of schooling	% Illiterate	% Currently attending school (11-14 yrs)	Median no. of years of schooling	% Illiterate	% Currently attending school (11-14 yrs)	Median no. of years of schooling
Urban areas									
Kerala	0.5	99.1	7.3	0.0	99.4	7.2	1.0	98.8	7.4
Madhya Pradesh	8.7	83.5	5.3	6.7	86.6	5.4	11.2	80.0	5.3
Orissa	10.0	77.7	5.8	8.4	78.3	5.7	11.9	77.0	6.0
Punjab	2.0	94.5	5.7	2.2	93.7	5.4	1.6	95.5	6.1
Rajasthan	10.7	82.8	5.2	7.6	88.9	5.4	14.4	75.5	5.0
Tamil Nadu	3.4	87.4	6.4	3.8	87.6	6.3	3.0	87.1	6.5
Uttar Pradesh	11.9	80.7	5.1	9.3	81.3	5.1	15.0	80.0	5.1
West Bengal	9.3	76.6	4.8	8.0	78.5	5.0	10.6	74.9	4.6

Source: *National Family Health Survey-II 1998-99*, India. Pp. 26, 27, 28 and 33, Andhra Pradesh pp. 20, 21, 22 and 23, Bihar pp. 23, 24, 25 and 26, Madhya Pradesh pp. 20, 21, 22 and 23, Orissa pp. 20, 21, 22 and 23, Rajasthan pp. 20, 21, 22 and 23 and Uttar Pradesh pp. 23, 24, 25 and 26.

APPENDIX TABLE 2.14
Total household population above age 6 by median number
of completed years of schooling by residence and sex, 1998-99

State/India	Median no. of years of schooling					
	Rural areas			Urban areas		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
All India	4.6	0.0	7.3	8.3	5.8	2.6
Andhra Pradesh	3.5	0.0	1.4	7.7	5.3	6.4
Assam	NA					
Bihar	3.0	0.0	0.0	8.0	4.3	6.2
Gujarat	4.9	0.0	3.2	8.3	6.0	7.4
Haryana	5.5	0.0	3.4	8.8	6.7	8.1
Himachal Pradesh	NA					
Karnataka	4.7	0.0	3.1	8.9	6.9	7.8
Kerala	7.8	7.4	7.6	9.2	8.7	9.0
Madhya Pradesh	3.8	0.0	1.5	7.5	4.7	5.9
Maharashtra	NA					
Orissa	4.9	0.0	3.2	7.8	5.2	6.5
Punjab	5.4	2.6	4.4	9.5	8.4	8.8
Rajasthan	3.9	0.0	0.0	7.5	3.6	5.7
Tamil Nadu	5.7	3.1	4.8	8.3	6.3	7.4
Uttar Pradesh	4.1	0.0	1.2	7.8	5.1	6.0
West Bengal	4.0	0.0	2.6	8.5	5.7	7.3

Note: State-level reports of NFHS-II for Assam, Himachal Pradesh and Maharashtra are not yet available.

NOTES

1. Almost half of the 42 districts selected in the first phase of DPEP were in Madhya Pradesh. The other states that participated in the programme were Assam, Haryana, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The second phase of the programme was launched around 1996 and DPEP is now in operation in nearly 45 per cent of all the districts of India.
2. According to the Census of India, a person who can both read and write with understanding in any language is enumerated as literate. A person who can merely read but cannot write is not literate. This definition of literacy has remained virtually the same since the question was included in the census enumeration beginning 1981.
3. It is often argued that school attendance (and also enrolment figures) towards the end of the school year is low as compared to the beginning or the middle of the academic year. Indian censuses generally have a reference date of 1 March, which is much closer to the end of the academic year. However, since the reference period remains more or less unchanged, the statistics on attendance do indicate a time trend.
4. Some of the districts in the other three states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar, where rural female literacy was below 20 per cent, were covered in the second and third phases of DPEP.

5. The literacy rates for the 42 DPEP phase I districts based on the 2001 Census were provided by the Registrar General of India, Mr J.K. Banthia. His help is gratefully acknowledged.
6. **Sources:**
 - a. NSS 43rd Round, 1991. *Employment and Unemployment in India, 1987-88*. Sarvekshna, Journal of the National Sample Survey Organisation, Department of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of India, Vol. XV, No. 2, Issue No. 49, Oct/Dec.
 - b. NSSO, 1997. *Employment and Unemployment in India, 1993-94*. Report No. 409. Fifth Quinquennial Survey, NSS 50th Round (July 1993-June 1994), New Delhi.
 - c. International Institute for Population Sciences, 1995, India, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS)*, 1992-93, Mumbai.
 - d. International Institute for Population Sciences. 2000. India, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-II)*, 1998-99. Mumbai.
 - e. Census 1981.
 - f. Census of India 1991, Series-1, India, *Final Population Totals: Brief Analysis of Primary Census Abstract*, Paper-2 of 1992, Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India.
 - g. Census of India 2001, India, *Provisional Population Totals*, Series-1, Paper-1 of 2001. Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India.
7. In some of the states, enrolment ratios of above 140 are very likely due to the discrepancies in the numerator in relation to the denominator of the estimates. The number of children in a given class may include children younger and/or older than the children of the typical age for that class. As a result, the number of children in the numerator can increase even beyond the number of children in the population in the age-group that is used in the denominator to estimate the enrolment ratio. A.C. Mehta has discussed this issue at some length in 'A Survey of Estimate of Over-age and Under-age Children at the School Level in India', 1993.
8. Official Gross Enrolment Ratios (GERs) based on the enrolment data are collected from recognised schools only. No adjustment is made even for the enrolment in government-supported schemes such as NFE, etc. Therefore, if the educational statistics of the central and state governments are considered, the official GER is a gross underestimation of the real situation. In all probability, even if underage children are shown as enrolled, the age is recorded as 5 or 6 years. This creates problems with the calculation of GER/NER corresponding to the official age-group of 6-11 years. Which denominator should be used in such situations: 5-9 or 6-10 year age-group? Alternative sources of information on children attending/not attending school also need to be explored to supplement the GER/NER. It is also suggested that India should start collecting data on the completion rate and the average number of years required for completing primary education (Chapter 5, Aggarwal, 2000a).
9. The relative stagnancy of GER in DPEP-II districts needs in-depth analysis at the block and cluster level. More concentrated efforts need to be made to ensure that out-of-school children are brought back to the school at the earliest. Prevailing NER for these districts is low and nowhere near 100. Only 16 of the 84 districts could be of a satisfactory level as far as NER is concerned. The real challenge of improving access and retention lies in 44 districts (out of 84 districts for which data was analysed) where the NER was less than 75 per cent. The coverage through AS/EGS may not be very high in these districts and so is the case with the enrolment in other modes of

education. Many low-level NER districts are the most backward districts in the otherwise educationally backward states. The real test for the country's ability to universalise access and retention lies in the type of districts mentioned earlier. The above results should also be seen in the context of other findings such as overcrowded classrooms, high Pupil Teacher Ratio and lack of funds for civil works under the regular state budget (Chapter 5, Aggarwal, 2000a).

10. The school attendance rates derived from the two NFHS data have been higher than the rates based on the NSS conducted around the same time. It is difficult to know the reasons for this discrepancy but it may have to do with the sampling procedures used in the two independent national data collection efforts.

11. **Sources:**

- a. *National Family Health Survey I*, India 1992-93, IIPS (IIPS), Bombay.
- b. *National Family Health Survey I*, Andhra Pradesh 1992, Population Research Centre, Andhra Pradesh and IIPS, Bombay, May 1995.
- c. *National Family Health Survey I*, Tamil Nadu 1992, Population Research Centre, Tamil Nadu and IIPS, Bombay, December 1994.
- d. *National Family Health Survey I*, Orissa 1993, Population Research Centre, Bhubaneswar and IIPS, Bombay, March 1995.
- e. *National Family Health Survey I*, Madhya Pradesh 1992, Population Research Centre, Madhya Pradesh and IIPS, Bombay, April 1995.
- f. *National Family Health Survey I*, Karnataka 1992-93, Population Research Centre, Bangalore and IIPS, Bombay, February 1995.
- g. *National Family Health Survey I*, Gujarat, 1993, Population Research Centre, Vadodara and IIPS, Bombay, March 1995.
- h. *National Family Health Survey I*, Haryana, 1993, Population Research Centre, Chandigarh and IIPS, Bombay, February 1995.
- i. *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2)*, India 1998-99, Madhya Pradesh, IIPS, Mumbai, April 2001.
- j. *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2)*, India 1998-99, Orissa, IIPS, Mumbai, April 2001.
- k. *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2)*, India 1998-99, Andhra Pradesh, IIPS, Mumbai, May 2000.
- l. *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2)*, India 1998-99, IIPS, Mumbai, October 2000.
- m. *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2)*, India 1998-99, Rajasthan, IIPS, Mumbai, May 2001.
- n. *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2)*, India 1998-99, Bihar, IIPS, Mumbai, May 2001.
- o. *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2)*, India 1998-99, Andhra Pradesh, IIPS, Mumbai, April 2001.
- p. *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2)*, India 1998-99, Haryana, IIPS, Mumbai, July 2001.
- q. *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2)*, India 1998-99, Gujarat, IIPS, Mumbai, August 2001.

12. The data presented here refers to the undivided states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

3 HIERARCHIES OF ACCESS

Vimala Ramachandran

The overwhelming finding that emerges from a desk review of reports and data on education in the 1990s is that there has been a significant increase in overall literacy rates and school participation rates across the country. Gender and social disparities have declined with an overall increase in school attendance.¹ As discussed in Chapter 1, this is more than confirmed by the Census 2001 data and also the recent NFHS-II (1998–99) data. Perhaps the most significant change that has taken place in the 1990s is the increase in the demand for primary education across the country. Intensive campaigns, enrolment drives and the changing social and economic situation contributed to an appreciable increase in the demand for schooling.

There has been a decline in the proportion of never enrolled children (see Appendix Table 2.4). Data also reveals an increase in the number of schools across the country—Alternative Schools, Education Guarantee Scheme schools and private aided and private unaided schools. DPEP was initiated in low female literacy areas, and it is encouraging to note that that very low female literacy districts have shown the maximum gains in literacy levels—especially in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan (Census 2001). The share of girls to total enrolment in very low female literacy districts increased from 43.8 per cent in 1995–96 to 46.7 per cent in 1998–99 (Aggarwal 2000a).

While this is indeed an encouraging trend, the data also indicates that we still have a long way to go before gender and social gaps are bridged. As Yash Aggarwal (2000b) points out, ‘While household enumeration has been conducted in many DPEP districts/states to identify out-of-school children, the findings are not available in most of the cases.... The NSS estimates (52nd Round data, 1995–96) indicate that 31 per cent of children in the 6–11 age-group were not attending school ... availability of

schooling facility even within the habitation does not offer any guarantee that all children in the eligible age-group attend school.' This observation is reinforced by Vaidyanathan and Nair (2001: 26), 'While the narrowing of spatial disparities suggests that educationally poor areas have experienced, in general, relatively rapid improvements, scrutiny at a more disaggregated level (*talukas* and villages) reveals the existence of pockets of persistent educational backwardness.'

A large number of children belonging to disadvantaged communities, working children and children with special needs have not yet been covered (coverage of AS and EGS schools are limited to some regions of the country). DPEP data reveals that this is particularly true of phase II districts, where participation levels are still very low. Similarly, children living in urban slums and peripheral areas have largely remained outside the reach of DPEP. Without addressing the concerns of urban out-of-school children, the goal of Universalisation of Primary Education (UPE) cannot be achieved in its entirety. Household surveys coordinated in 1997-98 by Vaidyanathan and Nair (2001) further confirm that, 'literacy rate variations across space and between gender and caste groups are highly correlated; and that higher overall literacy goes with lower disparities between these groups'. Hence, the more educationally backward the region, the greater are social and gender inequalities (see Table 3.1).

However, we have yet to generate adequate data on educational access of disadvantaged groups. As indicated in Chapter 2, existing data sources have their limitations. While NSS, NFHS and other sample-survey data give us a macro picture, intra-regional and intra-community diversities as such are not captured in such surveys. Further, given the time lag in the publication of the detailed Census 2001 tables, most researchers still rely on the 1991 Census data, which is outdated, particularly in the light of the preliminary Census 2001 data that reveals a significant jump in literacy levels. Some specific studies/data have addressed the issue of access and performance of marginal social groups. The NCAER data (see Table 3.1) indicates the wide fluctuations between the literacy rates for men and women belonging to landless families and SC and ST households in selected states. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, the overall literacy rates for men and women are 62 per cent and 28 per cent respectively and these figures sharply contrast with 38.2 per cent and 7.4 per cent among landless families and 48.1 per cent and 13.8 per cent among the SCs.

Researchers have pointed out that 50 per cent of dalit children who enter primary school leave by class V, with a majority dropping out before they reach class III (Nambissan 2001). According to the MODE/

TABLE 3.1
Educational indicators of select states

Indicator	Kerala	Tamil Nadu	Uttar Pradesh	Rajasthan	West Bengal	Maharashtra	Orissa	Haryana	Madhya Pradesh
Literacy rate (7+)									
Male	93.0	75.0	62.0	60.0	66.0	71.0	68.0	70.0	59.0
Female	87.0	53.0	28.0	19.0	50.0	47.0	41.0	38.0	27.0
Net enrolment rate (6-14)									
Male	99.0	91.0	73.0	78.0	67.0	88.0	79.0	84.0	69.0
Female	98.0	84.0	53.0	42.0	65.0	82.0	63.0	72.0	56.0
Discontinuation rate (6-14)									
Male	1.5	7.5	3.3	3.1	5.9	5.9	6.2	3.9	7.0
Female	2.0	14.8	5.6	6.6	6.9	8.4	9.3	4.6	9.0
Literacy rate of land-less wage earners									
Male	86.5	60.5	38.2	44.0	43.6	54.6	43.0	52.5	40.1
Female	77.9	41.4	7.4	5.6	27.5	29.2	15.7	24.2	14.1
Literacy rate of medium size landholders									
Male	98.4	89.3	80.5	63.7	83.8	70.1	85.9	72.5	64.2
Female	92.7	49.7	41.6	19.8	68.6	49.4	55.7	39.1	28.2
Literacy rate of large landholders									
Male	98.6	87.8	83.1	65.9	93.4	84.2	87.1	72.8	73.0
Female	100.0	61.1	53.8	21.4	84.3	51.4	64.2	45.3	37.6

Literacy rate of STs									
Male	-	-	-	39.1	-	52.9	40.7	-	42.8
Female	-	-	-	7.5	-	25.2	15.6	-	16.8
Literacy rate of SCs									
Male	82.6	57.3	48.1	51.8	62.5	60.5	60.4	60.1	47.4
Female	72.2	37.4	13.8	9.1	46.0	34.4	29.8	28.9	17.5
Literacy rate of dominant minority									
Male	94.0	85.8	47.1	45.9	59.3	75.6	73.6	84.5	67.1
Female	89.4	67.9	20.2	7.8	44.4	52.1	41.5	59.7	30.3
Literacy rate of other Hindus									
Male	95.0	80.6	70.8	66.4	75.5	76.8	78.4	74.0	69.1
Female	87.4	57.9	35.6	23.9	58.8	51.5	2.4	43.1	34.5
Ever enrolment rate of landless wage earners									
Male	98.4	88.4	52.7	63.1	51.1	77.1	62.2	69.1	54.1
Female	100.0	76.8	25.8	15.2	45.5	72.5	32.2	50.0	39.3
Discontinuation rate of landless wage earners									
Male	1.7	9.5	5.2	4.1	3.5	6.0	11.4	4.6	9.2
Female	6.1	17.4	4.4	17.2	16.2	12.3	19.8	4.4	13.4

Source: Shariff and Sudarshan 1996.

UNICEF Report (1995), 'The socio-economic profile appears to be a barrier to enrolment directly or indirectly. SC/ST families tend to live in colonies removed by a kilometre or more from the main village. A school in the village within walking distance for the families in the main village would still be at a distance to these children. Second, a feeling of alienation from the rest of the village and in turn fear (real or otherwise) of discrimination in school may keep these children away from school. At an indirect level, the high incidence of non-enrolment in SC/ST families almost "legitimises" not going to school and makes it the norm rather than the exception in the community....' The learning environment, attitude of teachers, backstopping support from home/parents and the sheer economics of school participation for extremely poor/landless families—all these factors tend to push children out of school.² Dominant perceptions about mental abilities of dalit or tribal children coupled with stereotypes about certain communities lead to subtle and sometimes even blatant discrimination against some children.³

What about girls? We have made considerable progress with respect to girls' enrolment and as revealed in Census 2001, in the more backward regions like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, many more girls are in school than ever before. However, the situation of girls in poor households among disadvantaged groups remains a cause for concern. Education may be technically free, but it is not so in reality. Given the quality of government schools, parents also incur some expenditure on tuitions—even though this is more prevalent among children going to private unaided and aided schools. This has many implications for girls' participation (Bashir 2000a, De et al. 2001). While gender is a determining factor at the time of decision-making by parents on whether and where to enrol, independent research studies and DPEP studies reveal that gender inequities and gender bias were not significant among enrolled girl children (De et al. 2001).

Administrators, educational researchers and development practitioners agree that discrimination inside the school continues to be a major barrier in school participation for girls and other marginal groups. Unfortunately, without adequate data, it is not possible to make generalisations on push and pull factors in DPEP. With the exception of recent household survey data from Karnataka (see Appendix Table 2.11), the programme has not generated any kind of textured micro data. This continues to be an important lacuna in the DPEP information system.

These extant issues of access and social equity in government formal schools are overwhelming and need to be given constant priority. Issues

of equity in education seem to have taken on more complex overtones within the emergent context of declining enrolment in formal government schools, the growth of private schools across the nation and the opening of state-sponsored ASs and EGSs in some parts of the country. This new development seems to be reinforcing the existing stratification evident in our educational system in rural areas (which so far has been a defining feature of urban areas). Further, what is significant is that it is giving rise to a new trend of 'hierarchies of access', whereby, paradoxically, the democratisation of access to schools seems to be accompanied by a reaffirmation of a child's caste, community and gender in defining which school she or he attends.

To add to the complexity, the accumulating empirical evidence illustrates that while most teachers in private schools are untrained and work under adverse conditions, teachers in the extant government schools or the AS/EGS are ill-equipped to address the needs of first-generation learners. In addition to concerns of quality and standards, what is disturbing is that there are no consistent policies vis-à-vis unrecognised schools. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to exploring the variety of factors that frame these emerging dynamics of 'hierarchy of access' and their implications for issues of equity.

HIERARCHIES OF ACCESS: DEFINING THE PROBLEM

A significant revelation in recent years has been the documentation of a gradual decline in class I enrolment. 'Over the years, the enrolment in formal schools has shown declining trends.... It is observed that the states, which witnessed slower growth in formal school enrolment, registered faster increase if the enrolment of formal and alternative modes is combined. This is particularly true of Madhya Pradesh.... For the 1998-99 and 1999-2000 period, as many as 14 districts (out of a total of 40) showed a decline of more than 5 per cent in grade I enrolment.... The decline in enrolment of class I is more alarming for the educationally backward states like Orissa and Assam.... A pertinent question at this stage is, where are the children going?' (Aggarwal 2000a: 45-46). Further, DPEP data also reveals that after a spurt of enrolment in 1995-96 and 1996-97 in DPEP-I, class I enrolment is declining. At the national level, enrolment has remained steady at 110 million for some time now.

While enrolment in government schools has remained stagnant, there is growing evidence of a large number of out-of-school children on the one hand and growth of and enrolment in private schools on the other.

This is indeed a disturbing trend, especially in the educationally backward regions of the country. Table 3.2 documents that private schools constitute anywhere between 5–10 per cent of primary schools in Karnataka, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh (and the share increases with higher education) along with Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra as well. Research studies reveal that while there is a rising demand for primary education across the country and a sharp reduction in children who have never enrolled, there has been a steady growth in the number of private schools—in both rural and urban areas⁴ (Aggarwal 2000b, Bashir 1994, Krishnaji 1996,⁵ Srivastava 1997, quoted in De et al. 2001).⁶ At the primary stage, 6 per cent of rural children and 19 per cent of urban children are studying in private unaided schools; this proportion goes up when we include the 31 per cent of children who are studying in private aided schools (World Bank 2001).

TABLE 3.2
Distribution of primary schools by management, 1998–99

State	Government			Private		Others	Data not available
	Dept education	Tribal welfare	Local body	Aided	Unaided		
Andhra Pradesh	78.11	8.37	4.42	8.69	0.04	0.02	0.36
Assam	96.44	0.87	1.15	0.20	0.13	0.26	0.95
Bihar	97.63	0.21	0.06	1.19	0.04	0.06	0.82
Gujarat	9.86	6.69	79.54	1.88	0.82	0.40	0.81
Haryana	90.83	0.65	0.39	1.27	3.60	0.21	3.05
Himachal Pradesh	97.98	0.28	0.14	0.07	0.07	0.57	0.89
Karnataka	87.05	0.47	1.16	3.43	6.30	0.15	1.44
Kerala	45.01	0.25	3.54	49.86	0.14	0.46	0.74
Madhya Pradesh	66.46	22.43	1.48	1.17	5.32	1.23	1.91
Maharashtra	0.93	1.85	78.53	14.57	3.58	0.13	0.41
Orissa	93.78	3.69	0.55	0.32	0.52	0.28	0.86
Tamil Nadu	13.78	4.36	71.27	10.00	0.16	0.12	0.30
Uttar Pradesh	92.08	0.38	1.23	1.90	2.79	0.57	1.04
West Bengal	8.24	0.23	90.42	0.18	0.03	0.09	0.81
DPEP States	62.43	10.34	19.06	3.96	2.65	0.43	1.14

Source: Yash Aggarwal: *Trends in Access and Retention, a Study of Primary Schools in DPEP Districts*.

Among the reasons for the growth of private schools is the reported decline in government-school quality (poor infrastructure, shortage of teachers, lack of accountability of government schools leading to teacher absenteeism and negligence). This gives way to a positive preference for

private schools, even though they may have a relatively poor infrastructure, less qualified teachers and are definitely more expensive (Aggarwal 2000a, De et al. 2001, PROBE Report 1999, Vaidyanathan and Nair 2001). DPEP studies reveal that parents are becoming disillusioned with the overcrowding and poor quality of instruction in government schools and are opting to send their children to private, fee-charging schools. Free education offered by government schools is no longer an attraction (DPEP 2000d). Another reason for the disenchantment with government schools is the indifferent attitude of the teachers towards teaching/learning and an uncaring approach to the social and economic hardships faced by students from poor and vulnerable families. These issues are relevant, as 30–40 per cent of the population in educationally backward areas are barely able to meet survival needs (Aggarwal 2000a). Between 1986 and 1993, the enrolment in private unaided (recognised) schools increased at a compound growth rate of 9.5 per cent per annum. The corresponding increase in enrolment in government schools was 1.4 per cent per annum. While the contribution of private schools to Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) is significant, it raises a whole range of equity issues.

THE CHANGING COMPOSITION OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

IMPLICATIONS FOR GENDER AND SOCIAL EQUITY

In the last 10 years there has been growing evidence of a hierarchy of access to primary education between states, communities and groups, and different types of schools. DPEP focuses on improving access and participation of children in the 6–10 age-group, so that all such children, irrespective of their place of origin or socio-economic background, are able to complete at least five years of reasonably good-quality primary education. However, a few recent independent studies that have explored gender and equity questions (De et al. 2001, PROBE Report 1999, Vaidyanathan and Nair 2001) reveal a disturbing picture. Dysfunctional government schools continue to be an area of concern in the more under-developed regions of the country. Where children of the more powerful groups shift to private schools, the pressure on government schools declines sharply. While there is a growing demand for primary education, even in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and Rajasthan, the ability of the government schools to respond has not been demonstrated as yet. With the exception

of Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, which have shown strong political will to ensure universal access to elementary education, the same cannot be said for other educationally backward states.

The most compelling evidence has been thrown up in reviews and research studies done under the aegis of DPEP. Aggarwal (2000a: 44) points out that while there was a rapid increase in enrolment in the formal system in the first two years of DPEP (phase I districts), 'subsequently most of the increase in enrolment is accounted for in the alternative school system'. Several states also report a gradual decline in class I enrolment, partly explained by a slowdown in population growth, improvement in the internal efficiency of the system and the increasing preference for private schooling in some parts of the country. Despite the rapid growth of private and aided schools in many areas of the country, it has been noted that the proportion of girls is higher in government schools as compared to private schools. 'The proportion of girls in unrecognised schools was very low as compared to their share in the government schools. The gender bias in school choice by parents is quite evident. Many villagers report that girls are sent to government schools because they are entitled to various types of incentives' (Aggarwal 2000b: 51). Researchers and administrators have also noted the prevalence of discrimination between girls and boys in the choice of schools (Sharma 1999).

TABLE 3.3
Changes in the share of SC/ST enrolment by levels of literacy

Category of district	% Share of SC/ST enrolment to total enrolment by category			
	SC		ST	
	1995-96	1998-99	1995-96	1998-99
Very low female literacy	15.8	16.7	20.3	23.9
Low female literacy	16.3	17.4	17.2	20.4
Moderate female literacy	22.3	22.9	9.3	11.7
High female literacy	8.9	7.6	3.8	3.0
Average for DPEP-I	18.6	19.4	13.4	15.9

Source: Aggarwal, 2000a.

As seen in Table 3.3, SC and ST populations are more concentrated in the low female-literacy districts and the share of SC/ST enrolment to total enrolment has increased. However, Aggarwal (2000a: 98-99) cautions, 'Taken together with evidence of increasing enrolment in private unaided (recognised) schools and increasing enrolment in AS/EGS

schools, this increase in SC/ST enrolment may not be as encouraging as it seems.'

Evidence shows that it is the poor who access government schools—and SC and ST populations are amongst the poorest. Among the poor, it is the most disadvantaged and those living in remote habitations who opt for alternative schools. Given that the hardest to reach are most likely to enrol in government primary schools, and that the better off (at least in most parts of the country) opt for private schools, the *raison de etre* of a government programme should ideally be to respond to the educational needs of the poor. However, as Majumdar (2001: 384) argues, 'The recent phenomenon (of growing private schools) is obviously an outcome of unfulfilled educational demand of certain relatively affluent sections of society and their dissatisfaction with the low quality of instruction imparted in government and aided schools. The question, therefore, is not about permitting the private sector in education but about promoting it. Is there a case for encouraging the expansion of the private sector at the elementary level?' Such expansion may further accentuate existing social divisions and reduce commitment towards quality improvement in government schools.⁷

The lack of a consistent policy towards private schooling and the proliferation of private schools in rural and urban areas—ostensibly imparting education in 'English medium'—have further widened the divide between social classes. For example, micro studies done in Haryana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and, to a lesser extent, in Chhattisgarh, revealed that almost all the upper castes and the economically well-off in the villages visited sent their children to private schools. Even children of school-teachers and other government functionaries were studying in private schools—recognised and unrecognised. Micro studies also point towards a trend among the better-off dalit and tribal communities to send their children to private schools. Essentially, the bottom line seems to be that of economic security; parents pull their children out of government schools and send them to private schools.

CONSEQUENCES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

The emerging dynamics of 'hierarchies of access' have important consequences for the process of teaching and learning in the classroom as it is also defined and created by the larger politics of teacher recruitment, appointment and training. According to Aggarwal (2000a: 99),

the large share of SC and ST population in DPEP-II districts is also associated with low literacy rates in these districts. It was observed that out of a total of 30 districts in which the ST population was more than 5 per cent, as many as 11 districts showed less than 10 per cent female ST literacy (1991 Census).... In the 66 districts where share of SC population was more than 5 per cent, as many as 29 districts had female literacy varying between 10 and 25 per cent (1991 Census). Thus most of the school-going children, especially the girls, in these districts will be first-generation learners.

Therefore, given that the proportion of government schools with a larger concentration of SC and ST students has been steadily increasing, such schools invariably have large numbers of first-generation learners and require more experienced teachers.

TABLE 3.4

Distribution of schools by share of SC/ST children to total enrolment

Phase I

<i>State</i>	<i>60–80% (1999–2000)</i>	<i>Above 80% (1999–2000)</i>
Assam	8.1	30.0
Haryana	7.7	2.8
Karnataka	6.6	5.7
Madhya Pradesh	11.4	15.7
Maharashtra	12.3	14.1
Tamil Nadu	9.2	10.6

Phase II

<i>State</i>	<i>Above 80% (1999–2000)</i>
Assam	42.7
Gujarat	28.9
Himachal Pradesh	15.8
Madhya Pradesh	15.4
Maharashtra	23.5
Orissa	23.0
West Bengal	15.7

Source: Aggarwal 2000a.

An overwhelming message emanating from DPEP studies and the Joint Review Mission (JRM) reports is that many states continue to face a shortage of teachers. This is more than evident in the data on the proportion of single-teacher schools, especially in phase II districts. In

DPEP phase I districts, the overall share of single-teacher schools has declined from 18.5 per cent in 1995–96 to 14.3 per cent in 1999–2000. But in DPEP phase II districts the proportion of single-teacher schools increased from 14.3 per cent in 1995–96 to 19.1 per cent in 1999–2000 (Aggarwal 2000a).

If the shortage of teachers in general and the proportion of single-teacher schools in particular is analysed in the context of teacher-student ratio, the emerging picture does not auger well, especially in educationally backward states. On the one hand, according to DPEP data, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa show a high percentage of schools with less than 20 students per class (the situation is different in multi-grade classrooms/single-teacher schools). On the other hand, in states like West Bengal, Assam and Uttar Pradesh the share of schools with more than 90 students per classroom is high, at times with states like Assam having only one-room schools. According to Aggarwal (2000a: 39), 'There were about 25,553 schools with an estimated enrolment of 6.12 million students for which the Student Classroom Ratio (SCR) was more than 90.'⁸ Another related issue that is integral to social equity is that most of the single-teacher schools, especially the AS/EGSs, are primarily frequented by children belonging to the SC and ST community (see Chapter 5).

Among the strategies adopted by DPEP to promote girls' participation is the recruitment of female teachers. DPEP data reveals that one-third of the teachers are women (33 per cent or more in Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu; 27 per cent in Maharashtra, 26 per cent in Assam and Uttar Pradesh, 25 per cent in Madhya Pradesh, 23 per cent in Orissa, 22 per cent in Bihar, 17 per cent in West Bengal and 34 per cent in Madhya Pradesh's DPEP districts). However, given the large number of single-teacher schools, the low distribution of women teachers in such schools is indeed worrisome; in addition, 72 per cent of two-teacher schools are without female teachers. For example, in Tamil Nadu 86.8 per cent and 89.4 per cent single-teacher schools do not have any female teachers in phase I and phase II districts respectively. However, the picture seems to be slightly better in AS, where reports indicate that Assam has 50 per cent, Bihar 100 per cent, Karnataka 10 per cent, Tamil Nadu 25 per cent, Uttar Pradesh 62 per cent and West Bengal 25 per cent single-teacher schools, where the teacher is female (DPEP 2000j). Though the presence of female teachers does have an impact on girls' participation, it emerges that functionality of schools is a far more critical factor for participation. Studies reveal that more than the gender of the teacher, dysfunctional schools and teacher

absenteeism have a negative impact as parents are not happy about leaving their daughters unsupervised in school (Srivastava 2001).

REVERSING THE TREND

The immediate need of the hour is to contain this trend, whereby the universalisation of primary education is accompanied by the emergence of segregated schools based on caste and community identity. The initial evidence seems to indicate that 'hierarchies of access' are becoming an inevitable feature of UEE and this does not portend well for a democracy that is defined by multiple social identities and voices. DPEP needs to keep this in mind and focus on steps that will strengthen the existing infrastructure as well as introduce new interventions that will make primary education truly democratic.

FUNCTIONING PRIMARY SCHOOLS—A KEY DETERMINANT

Essentially, research studies and reports on DPEP during the last five years confirm an increased demand for schooling among all sections of the population and also point to a significant rise in the supply of schools. Though gender inequalities have been shrinking and the prognosis for the future is positive, the persistence of regional, social and economic inequalities, particularly with respect to access to functioning schools of a reasonable quality remains an area of concern—more so in the educationally backward districts of the country and especially for first-generation learners.

STAKEHOLDERS FOR GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Who has a stake in improving primary schools? The PROBE Report (1999) and other studies of the late 1990s reveal that states like Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and, to a certain degree, Kerala have achieved universal elementary education mainly through government schools and private aided schools. In particular, children of almost all the important social and economic groups depend primarily on government schools. As a result, they have a stake not only in ensuring that schools function, but also in improving quality. It is rare to come across children in class V who cannot read or write. However, recent micro studies in Uttar Pradesh (Srivastava 2001) and the micro study conducted under this study in

Box 3.1

Evidence from villages studied in Rampur and Ballia, Uttar Pradesh

Economic reasons are, in many cases, not the most important reasons for sending children to school, or for keeping them out of school. The analysis of reasons cited by respondents for sending children to school, as well as of reasons cited for their non-enrolment or dropping out of school, throws some light on perspectives regarding male and female education. Economic reasons for sending boys to school are more important, than for girls, where social motives are considered more important. On the other hand, economic motives and retention of girls at home for domestic or other chores are quite significant in explaining their non-enrolment or dropping out. Another valuable reason, cited more for girls than for boys, is the non-usefulness of education for them. Of course gender-specific reasons form a third, important group of reasons. Our focus group discussions confirm the importance of social factors in sending girls to school as well as keeping them out of school. In the case of Muslims, as well, while economic reasons are important (for males), the social value placed on Islamic education keeps them out of secular education.

Of course, as Drèze and Gazdar (1996) have pointed out, all these reasons intensify if schools which are within the reach of a household are irregular, if teachers are not punctual, the core competencies are poorly taught and what is taught seems to be of little value.

Each of the villages surveyed by us has a government primary school. None of the schools surveyed by us were single-teacher schools and many had one or more female teachers. Several of the schools in Rampur had Urdu teachers. School buildings, though inadequate, were generally bricked or cemented. Though there were some variations between villages and districts, the central problem in these schools (as Drèze and Gazdar [1996] also point out) is the irregular unpunctual teachers. This is why the recruitment of female teachers and Urdu teachers has had virtually no impact on the educational participation of girls/Muslims in these areas. The irregularity of teachers as well as other problems were not only condoned, but probably abetted by a corrupt educational administration. Most of the private schools surveyed by us had bad infrastructure and teachers with poor qualifications. But these schools maintained a modicum of regular functioning and their education was attractively packaged, so that better-off groups also found them socially desirable.

Source: Srivastava 2001.

Chhattisgarh reveal that several children emerge from primary schools barely literate! Making sure schools work (according to the stipulated

timing and calendar) and that teachers teach has to become a non-negotiable agenda. While DPEP Educational Management Information System (EMIS) data from educationally backward districts suggests a sharp increase in enrolment, we still do not have any reliable information on functionality and quality.

We also have very little information on the functioning of VECs/School Betterment Committees/Parent Teacher Associations. What we do have (refer to the micro studies in this volume) is not very heartening. All the studies clearly indicate that strengthening mechanisms for community participation without ensuring the participation of parents is often counterproductive. Village leaders whose children do not go to government schools have no stake in it.

ELIMINATION OF SOCIAL BIASES

Elimination of gender, caste and community bias inside the classroom, especially among teachers, remains a challenge. The bias persists and is reflected through:

- Attitude of teachers and even educational administrators towards children from first-generation learner families.
- Stereotypes about tribal children (especially the more disadvantaged among tribal groups, for example Pahadi Korba, Majhwar, Pando and Kodaku in Chhattisgarh).
- Students from disadvantaged S communities (Valmiki, Rohit, Adi Dravida and other communities who were part of erstwhile untouchable groups).

The indicators all point to a much deeper malaise in our society. These are reflected in extensive reporting on the situation of dalits by noted journalist P. Sainath (articles appeared in *The Hindu*) and reports of organisations struggling against the persistence of caste prejudices (World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa in September 2001). While acknowledging that the teachers are as much a part of this society as anyone else, it becomes more than evident that the government has to play a more proactive role to ensure a bias-free and a prejudice-free classroom. This unfortunately has not happened in DPEP. While gender issues have been brought centrestage, the same cannot be said for caste, community and other social prejudices.

There is a pressing need to critically interrogate generic social categories like SC, ST and minorities and further break them down into more regionspecific sub-groups in order to address their needs more effectively. The most glaring example comes from Chhattisgarh where there are vast differences among the STs, with some being on the margin of the marginalised. The situation of the Oraon or even Gond tribes is far better than that of the Pahadi Korba and Majhwars, among whom it is difficult to find even one literate adult. Recent press reports on starvation deaths among the Pahadi Korba tribes and other marginalised sub-groups among SC and ST communities further reinforces the issue that these need micro-level and context-specific strategies since they remain the hardest to reach.

MOTIVATING AND TRAINING TEACHERS

DPEP studies and reports argue that the first and the most obvious implication of these hierarchies is for teacher training. Apart from social sensitisation mentioned above, special training would be necessary for handling first-generation learners, especially from socially and economically vulnerable groups. The second implication is for more focused and ongoing support from Block Resource Centres (BRCs) and Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs), with respect to pedagogic renewal. Third, these schools need to be placed on a special watch list. Given that existing mechanisms for community involvement, including VECs, are weak and strife-ridden, a far greater effort would be necessary on the part of the teacher to reach out. Teachers with commitment and aptitude would have to be posted in such schools. While the government has acknowledged the importance of the issue, specific strategies are yet to be developed to meet the changing composition of government schools. Similarly, the pedagogical implications of the changing composition of government schools are yet to be explored.

GROWING DEMAND FOR UPPER PRIMARY EDUCATION

Finally, there is unanimity among researchers and administrators about the need to increase children's access to upper primary and middle schools. The absence of post-primary educational opportunities continue to create greater inequalities in the system. Gender bias is more pronounced at this stage—many more girls drop out after the primary level because of lack of meaningful access to upper primary schools. Social inequalities in access are also more pronounced at the upper primary stage, with a smaller

proportion of children from SC and ST families studying in private aided and unaided schools. At this stage, it is the poor who depend more on government schools.

A recent World Bank report on the subject revealed that 72 per cent of the children in the 11–13 age-group attend school; only 43 per cent of them attend upper primary, the rest are in primary school.⁹ This information derived from the NSSO 52nd Round, Sixth Educational Survey (1993) and other DPEP reports reveal that the demand for upper primary education has been increasing exponentially in almost all areas, both rural and urban. Equally, given the wide variations in the quality of primary education, 61 per cent students (56 per cent girls) who enter class I complete the primary cycle. This national picture hides wide regional differences. However, what is encouraging is that most children who complete the primary cycle are eager to move on to the upper primary level. Micro studies (Chapters 8–13 in this book) also show that the presence of an upper primary and/or high school in the village is the most important factor affecting transition from primary to upper primary. This is particularly true for girls and children from poor families.

SUMMING UP

Hierarchies of access are clearly discernible at different levels and not all of them have been captured in DPEP data and research studies. At one level, children from clearly different social and economic groups attend various types of school—private unaided, private aided, government primary schools, EGS and AS. Even within government primary schools, there is some evidence of sharp difference in quality—physical facilities, community participation, allocation of funds (Majumdar 2001, Nambissan 2001: 384, Ramachandran and Sethi 2001). Single-teacher schools, multi-grade situations (especially when the teachers are not trained to handle it), poorly trained parateachers—all these have a greater impact on children from disadvantaged groups as such children have no other options (private schools, tuitions) and their parents cannot support them at home.

General household characteristics such as income, caste, occupation and educational level of parents continue to determine access, attendance, completion and learning achievements. Children from rural families with substantial land, non-agricultural occupations and educational level have greater access than children from landless, agricultural wage-earning families and migrating groups. In some regions of the country, for example,

Uttaranchal, researchers have found a strong positive correlation between distance of forest and water source and non-enrolment and dropout rate of girls, and even boys in specific age-groups (Pande 2001). Children-women ratio was found to be an influencing factor in the enrolment and continuation of girls in school and the work participation rate influenced the enrolment of boys in Andhra Pradesh (Krishnaji 2001). Similarly, in many areas, the number of animals to graze and manage also exerts influence on school participation, as parents cite grazing as an important reason for irregular attendance or non-enrolment. This is referred to as dependency ratio—the larger the number of infants and old people in the household (i.e., the higher the “dependency burden” on the household), the smaller are the chances of children getting enrolled in school’ (Vaidyanathan and Nair 2001). However, NGOs, especially those who are part of a nationwide campaign against child labour, argue that motivation of parents coupled with mobilisation of working children to get back to school can overcome this challenge. Srivastava’s (2001) study in Uttar Pradesh reveals that the burden of dependency is generally borne by adult women and it is not necessarily passed on to small children. It may, however, be of greater significance at the upper primary and middle-school level, particularly for girls.

Notwithstanding prevalent social and economic barriers to schooling, the overwhelming message emanating from DPEP schools is that the presence of a good-quality government school, which functions regularly, can indeed surmount many obstacles. Special strategies would, however, be necessary to reach out to the hard core—most of whom are people who not only belong to the most deprived sub-groups of SCs and STs but are also the people with almost no voice in society.

The challenge for DPEP is to reach out to this hardest-to-reach group with good-quality education. This merits more resources, more human resource inputs and a great deal of commitment from the government. Low-cost options will not do; they will merely accentuate existing cleavages in society.

NOTES

1. ‘Across states, districts and even villages, the literacy rates of females and scheduled castes and tribes (SC/STs), though much below average, are highly correlated with overall literacy rates. Also, inter-group disparities tend to decline as the average literacy rate increases. In other words, as we move up the scale of overall literacy, females and

SC/STs are found to be more literate. Also gender gaps as well as the differences between socially disadvantaged and other caste groups become narrower ...' (Vaidyanathan and Nair 2001: 25).

2. 'Schools in 46 districts in eight states were surveyed as part of the district primary education programme of the Ministry of Human Resources Development. The learning levels of over 50,000 students were assessed. It was found that in none of the 46 districts surveyed did primary school students achieve an average score of 80 per cent in the basic letter and word reading tests that were administered to assess their learning levels. In many districts students could barely read five to eight words correctly. Children also fared poorly in basic numerical skills' (*The Times of India* 1994, quoted in Nambissan, 1996).
3. P. Sainath, a noted journalist, has documented the situation of dalits across the country since 1999. Articles which appeared in *The Hindu* reveal persistent social discrimination inside the school. Certain specific groups among the SCs, like Valmiki, Rohit, Thoti, Chamar, and in tribal areas the non-dominant tribes and denotified tribes (classified as criminal tribes by the British) are not only discriminated against by the forward castes, but also by other dalits who consider them untouchable.
4. 'It is estimated that the enrolment in unrecognised schools is doubling every five years. The proportion of girls in unrecognised schools was very low as compared to their share in the government schools. The gender bias in school choice by the parents is quite evident.... What we need is that the government schools should compete with private schools in terms of quality of access, efficiency and performance standards and both sectors supplement each other's effort to achieve the goal of universal primary education' (Aggarwal 2000a: 100).
5. 'Less than 10 per cent of poor families have their children in private schools as against nearly 30 per cent of middle income families and 45 per cent of well-to-do families' (Krishnaji quoted on p. 12 of De et al. 2001).
6. Sajitha Bashir's study in Tamil Nadu in 1994 revealed that pupils in private unaided schools came from relatively well-off backgrounds, with only 10 per cent being SC. While in government schools, the proportion of SC children is 26 per cent in rural areas and 46 per cent in urban areas. She also discussed the educational status of parents from private unaided schools and aided schools as being very different, with more first-generation learners enrolled in government schools (Sajitha Bashir quoted in De et al. 2001).
7. 'This differentiation accentuates the precarious position of the disadvantaged groups in terms of access to basic education both quantitatively and qualitatively. This tendency, if allowed to continue, will further aggravate the already serious inequality in access to higher education, thus making a mockery of the notion that education is the most potent instrument for achieving greater equality of opportunity' (Vaidyanathan and Nair 2001: 43).
8. 'West Bengal has recorded the lowest share of female teachers—merely 15.8 per cent as compared to 73.6 per cent in Kerala. As a first priority, the share of female teachers needs to be improved in single and two-teacher schools.... Despite significant moves and gender sensitive recruitment policies, the position with respect to the availability and deployment of female teachers is less than satisfactory.... Serious concerns about deployment prevail, as the number of male-teacher schools is exceptionally large.... The trends indicate a stagnating share of SC/ST teachers in phase I' (Aggarwal 2000a: 75, Chapter 6).

9. 'Across the total population aged 15 years and above in 1995-96, 32 per cent had completed at least an upper primary schooling. There were major differences by gender and income group. For urban males the completion rate was 63.6 per cent and for rural females the rate was 14.6 per cent. While just over half of the members of the wealthiest 20 per cent of households had completed this level of schooling, the rate for the poorest 20 per cent was under 15 per cent' (World Bank 2002). *India Expanding and Improving Upper Primary Education in India*. March. p. iii.

4 INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS AND STRATEGIES

Vimala Ramachandran¹

Since the 1966 Education Commission of India, successive reports and policies of the government have suggested a number of institutional mechanisms and strategies to make the system more responsive to those who have been left out of education and more accountable to the 'community'. The 1968 and 1986 National Policies on Education argue that closer engagement with community issues would sensitise the teacher and also make the community more interested in what happens inside the school, thereby enabling all children to participate in educational processes. The key management interventions suggested over the years are:

- Provide schools within walking distance, closer to the place of dwelling and, if necessary, satellite schools for remote hamlets.
- Involve the community in managing/monitoring the school and establish village education committees (school management committees, parent-teacher associations, school betterment committees) with at least 50 per cent representation for women members and representatives of deprived social groups.
- Decentralise educational planning and administration, bring it closer to people and make it more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the community.
- Provide pre-school facilities/crèches near or within school premises.
- Introduce flexible school timings and a region-specific school calendar.
- Provide alternative modes/forms of schooling, combine formal with non-formal education, condensed courses/bridge courses for drop-outs and residential schools for special focus groups like working children, nomadic tribes and others.
- Provide incentives like a midday meal, uniforms, textbooks, exercise books, attendance scholarships and free bus passes.

- Address (teacher cadre) management issues that inhibit the implementation of government policies—grievance redressal, administrators' and teachers' unions' resistance to flexible timings, school calendar, recruitment of teachers, (principally women) albeit with lesser qualifications, from rural areas and in remote areas where teacher absenteeism is rampant.
- Recruit more women teachers in rural areas and expand the pool of women teachers by lowering qualifications, providing intensive training and continuing educational support. If necessary, appoint teachers to a specific school—on contract or agreement.
- Make curricula relevant and interesting.
- Gender sensitisation of teacher, teacher educators and administration.

Box 4.1

Government of India, Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1974: Strategies to encourage girls' education

- Co-education to be adopted as a general policy at the primary level—in view of the finding that quality of provisions in girls, schools are inferior both in terms of physical infrastructure and teachers.
- Free education for all girls up to the secondary school stage.
- Provision of primary schools within walking distance, establishment of ashram schools to serve clusters of villages, or peripatetic schools for girls who cannot attend formal schools and mobile schools for children of nomadic tribes.
- Develop graded curriculum for the above.
- Sustained mobilisation of public opinion and community support for creating a favourable environment for girls' education.
- Special incentives in low female enrolment areas.
- At least 50 per cent of the teachers at the elementary level should be women.
- Common core curriculum for boys and girls.
- Provision of three years of pre-school education and special efforts to increase the number of balwadis.
- Non-formal education for out-of-school girls and women—literacy skills and familiarisation with democratic processes.
- Equality of the sexes as a major value to be inculcated through the educational process. To this end, review of textbooks for content and presentation.

Positioned as a departure from existing strategies, DPEP adopted a holistic convergent approach with an accent on mainstreaming,

a holistic planning and management approach which goes beyond implementation of a disjointed set of individual schemes, perceives the task of universalisation of elementary education (UEE) in its totality, integrates all the measures needed to achieving UEE in the specific context of the district ... this holistic planning should incorporate a gender perspective in all aspects of planning and implementation process and be an integral part of all measures needed to achieve UEE... (GOI 1995).

The programme made efforts to incorporate gender concerns into its planning and implementation process. Scanning through reports and documents it is evident that, at the conceptual level, DPEP tried to adhere to many internationally accepted gender assessment requirements. Starting with the management and EMIS/DISE, DPEP flagged gender issues in all official monitoring and reporting systems. These monitoring systems were reinforced by the indices of gender and social equity to calculate the progress made. Specific mechanisms were provided for community mobilisation, mothers' involvement, school community interface, enrolment drives and better infrastructure. A wide range of localised strategies were promoted with the hope that they would lead to wider replication. Analysis of the issues flagged in DPEP documents and research studies reveal that many regions of the country have not followed a co-ordinated and focused approach to reach out to the hardest to reach—SCs, STs and children living in scattered habitations. The exceptions are Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (where EGS has changed the terms of discourse on primary education), Andhra Pradesh and, to a lesser extent, Karnataka where efforts have been made to track out-of-school children and reach out to them through special programmes like bridge courses.

In this chapter we explore the institutional mechanisms and systems created under DPEP to address gender and equity gaps in primary education and the extent to which they have been successful. A review of these interventions indicates that it is only in certain areas like planning and management, school-community linkages and school infrastructure and facilities that a somewhat uniform effort with respect to gender and social equity has been made across the DPEP states and districts—at times with mixed consequences. Yet, at another level, other DPEP initiatives have tended to be a pastiche of very localised efforts (e.g., escort

service for girls, special coaching classes, etc.) that are either transient in nature or limited in outreach, making it impossible to draw conclusions on their efficacy in attaining gender and social equity. Hence, the overall picture that is generated seems rather skewed and at times a distant cry from the promise of social equity enshrined in the DPEP goals.

PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

DPEP heralded many changes in the administration of elementary education. Until recently, the EE Bureau was managing all the externally aided elementary education programmes while a separate EE Bureau managed most of the domestically funded programmes (an exception being the Joint UN Janshala Programme). These bodies have now been merged into one EE Bureau. Given that externally aided Central Sector Schemes (government schemes that are funded and monitored by GOI) require more intensive monitoring and regular reporting to donors, the EE Bureau established management systems tailored for systematic monitoring of the stated objectives of the programme. At the national level the National Project Director (Mahila Samakhya) is also the Director, Gender and Early Childhood Education (ECE) and is in charge of gender mainstreaming strategies. Similarly, a Director in the EE Bureau was made responsible for tracking the progress of other socially disadvantaged groups. Monitoring a nation-wide programme was done with the help of the Technical Support Group (TSG) located in Educational Consultants India Limited. The group consisted essentially of education professionals (researchers and practitioners) who collated the data, conducted studies and provided technical support to state governments in a number of areas like gender training, pedagogy and curriculum, alternative schools, teacher training/capacity building, infrastructure, etc. Some senior faculty members of the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) interacted with the TSG team and provided academic leadership.

At the state level, a Gender Coordinator (girls' education, ECE) and a State Resource Group (SRG) were established to track girls' education. They work closely with the national gender team to ensure that gender issues are addressed and integrated in all the activities and plans. Six monthly national meetings and workshops of state-level Gender Coordinators provide a forum to review progress and make concrete recommendations to the periodic meetings of Education Secretaries and DPEP Directors. They also provide documentation support, guidance and

resource support. Similarly, Gender Coordinators at the state level are expected to play a catalytic role in the districts. They identify low female literacy areas and constraints, review action plans made to promote girls' participation, organise conventions and awareness camps, facilitate the formation of mothers' groups and focus on training of women for effective participation in VECs. At the district level, a Gender Coordinator is given the responsibility for tracking girls' participation. She is supported by gender focal points at the block/taluka levels. In some states, a District Resource Group (DRG) provides this support. There are inter-state variations in how this issue is managed at the district and sub-district levels. For example, Assam, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal have formed resource groups at both the state and district levels. Tamil Nadu has created a 10-member SRG for women's development and ECE and a 12-member DRG for women's development and ECE. Andhra Pradesh has established resource groups at state, district and *mandal* levels, while Bihar has formed SRG and DRG under Mahila Samakhya, which, in the state, are also funded by DPEP. While the chain of command for monitoring gender issues is institutionalised and visible, it is not so for monitoring and supporting other first-generation learners in disadvantaged communities.

The BRCs and CRCs are expected to provide continuous educational support to the teacher, forge linkages with the VEC and function as the information and feedback loop for DPEP. Annual plans of the district are generated on the basis of information provided by CRC and BRC personnel. This system has brought training to the doorstep of the teacher and has broken the isolation of village schoolteachers by linking them to a group. However, there is little evidence of the structure being used to actively pursue equity goals, particularly with respect to eliminating gender and social bias inside the classroom and ensuring participation of children who are out of school. There are, of course, exceptions. For example, in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh the BRCs maintain data on out-of-school children/Lok Sampark Abhiyan. However, their role in strategic planning at the block or cluster level to reach out and plan for the non-enrolled or the out-of-school child is not clearly defined.

It would be unfair to say that this was just lip service or a cosmetic gesture towards the objective of gender equity. The range of data available in terms of reports and research studies done on gender issues is quite impressive, even though there are regional variations, with several DPEP phase II districts being quite poor in terms of strategic interventions,

documentation and data. Comparatively, the DPEP phase I districts have a better database, indicating that the EE Bureau played a proactive role in generating gender-related information. Evidence suggests that community mobilisation and other gender-related inputs have significantly increased enrolment, especially of girls. Given the outreach of DPEP, the debate on gender issues has percolated right down to the cluster level, leading to greater engagement with gender issues within the system.

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES

It is reported that if there is one area in which DPEP has made considerable progress across all the DPEP states it is in school infrastructure and facilities. 'Although DPEP focuses on quality improvement; the provision for civil works has been an important component of the development strategy. DPEP seeks to provide limited resources for enhancement and upkeep of schooling infrastructure. Unlike a teacher, a school once constructed cannot be moved to another location. Therefore, a judicious choice about infrastructure development is needed' (Aggarwal 2000a: 34). Under DPEP-I, as many as 5,959 new schools were constructed and 6,466 additional classrooms built in the different districts. This was followed by 10,502 new schools and 17,753 new classrooms in the first three years of DPEP-II, most of the activity being concentrated in Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. The DISE data captures the condition of school infrastructure on an annual basis. However, as seen in Box 4.2, comprehensive data is not available in one place (it may be available with project managers at the centre, state and district level, but researchers only had access to data in JRM reports), and data on toilets and drinking water show that the coverage has neither been comprehensive nor substantial.

There is no doubt that community participation has been integral to DPEP's mandate of providing basic school facilities and it is the VEC which is the mediating body for all DPEP-sponsored civil works (except, apparently, in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka). This is clearly evident in the Madhya Pradesh panchayat (Chapter 8). However, social discrepancies do arise, as in Haryana (Chapter 10) where the attraction of private schools for relatively well-off families has meant that the government schools are being ignored by the VEC. In Tamil Nadu too, the primary school in the dalit *basti*, despite falling under the aegis of DPEP, has not witnessed DPEP-sponsored infrastructural improvement (Chapter 13).

Box 4.2

Illustrative list for provision of toilets and drinking water

- Assam: 185 toilets were built in phase I and 295 in phase II schools. Drinking water facilities are provided in 513 schools of phase I districts.
- Haryana: in DPEP phase I 1,991 toilets were constructed and hand pumps were installed in 808 schools. In phase II, 738 toilets were built and drinking water facilities were provided in 315 schools.
- Himachal Pradesh: 334 toilets were built and drinking water facilities were provided in 264 schools.
- Karnataka: Drinking water and toilet facilities were provided in all existing girls' schools.
- Kerala: In phase I districts, toilets were provided in 117 schools, drinking water facilities in 83 schools. In phase II districts, toilets were provided in 166 schools and drinking water in 184 schools.
- Maharashtra: 2,259 toilets were constructed in phase I districts and 509 in phase II. Drinking water facilities were provided in 1,118 schools (phase I) and 540 (phase II) schools.
- Orissa: 273 toilets were completed and drinking water facilities were provided in 54 schools.
- Tamil Nadu: 1,048 toilets were built in phase I and 385 in phase II districts. Drinking water facilities were provided in 687 (phase I) and 43 (phase II) schools.
- Uttar Pradesh: 7,497 toilets were built in phase II schools and drinking water facilities were provided in 2,410 phase II schools.

Source: DPEP (2000 and 2001). 12th and 13th Joint Review Mission Reports.

SCHOOL—COMMUNITY LINKAGES

'DPEP stresses participatory process whereby the local community would play an active role in promoting enrolment, retention, achievement and school effectiveness. This process will be institutionalised through the VEC and bodies like Mother Teacher Associations (MTAs). The programme design broadly encompasses the following inter-related and mutually reinforcing areas.... Building community support for primary education through institutions like VEC, MTA and setting in processes such as awareness campaigns, micro-planning and training of the functionaries of VEC, MTA...' (GOI 1995).

VECs, MTA, School Betterment Committees, Women Motivator Groups—community-based groups linked to primary schools come in

different forms and shapes in DPEP. Almost all the districts are expected to report on the constitution and function of such groups. While VECs are expected to take an interest in facility improvement and judiciously manage Rs 2,000 for maintenance, MTAs in many areas are more concerned with regularity of children's attendance, their hygiene and providing continuous support to the teacher. Interestingly, in Himachal Pradesh, where both coexist, VECs are mainly male dominated and the MTAs/PTAs essentially comprise women. Data reveals that while all the states have constituted VECs, most of them have also constituted women's groups. These are also known in some areas as women motivator groups (2,944 in Himachal Pradesh, 1,778 in Kerala, 1,190 in Bihar, 3,516 in Haryana, 5,687 in Gujarat, 13,593 in Maharashtra, 11,529 in Orissa and 2,535 in Uttar Pradesh).

The percentage of women in VECs is around 30, with many states nominating Anganwadi workers and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) into the committee. While VECs and other community-based groups have been given a pivotal role in DPEP, there is no mechanism to systematically collect information on their functioning within their specific local contexts. In the absence of qualitative data on their functioning and impact, it is difficult to make any conclusive statement on their effectiveness. There is also no information on whether women members and representatives of disadvantaged groups are trained/supported to participate in VECs. We did not come across any guidelines on the sequence of activities/implementation—i.e., identification and training of women and representatives of special focus groups, notification or formation of VECs, continuing support to relatively disempowered groups for active participation and monitoring regularity of meetings.

Micro studies done under the aegis of this research study and village-based survey reports edited by Vaidyanathan and Nair (2001) reveal that the VEC has not been an effective equity tool. This has also been the feedback from NGOs and government programmes working with women's groups in rural areas.² The social composition of the VEC is usually biased in favour of the higher castes whose children and grandchildren are known to attend private schools. As a result VEC members have little stake in improving the quality or effectiveness of the school. They are more interested in the 'status' that membership brings in the eyes of the district administration. In many areas the committee rarely worries about enrolment and/or regular participation of the most deprived sections of the society. On the contrary, members of the VEC in Haryana hire young boys in the 11+ age-group as pali or contract labour and, as Vandana Mahajan (see

Chapter 10) reports, the only time it met in the last one year was to auction trees that fell down in a storm! Similarly, the VECs studied in Tamil Nadu (Chapter 13) have little interest in the Adi Dravida Primary School in the village. A similar situation has been reported in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka (see Chapters 9, 11 and 12).

On the other hand, there is considerable anecdotal and some qualitative evidence to show that MTAs have closer linkages with the school—if they are active and are involved. The 12th JRM reports from Himachal Pradesh discuss the effectiveness of MTAs, but point towards a clear gender differentiation in the role of MTAs and VECs. School Management Committees (SMCs) have also been established in several states—50,884 in Andhra Pradesh, 325 in Kerala, 22,940 in Madhya Pradesh and 13,596 in Rajasthan. Karnataka is in the process of phasing out VECs and replacing them with School Management and Betterment Committees composed of parents (DPEP 2001a).

There is no evidence (at least in the DPEP documents and reports scanned) of VECs, MTAs or SMCs taking up social access issues. On the contrary, the situation in Madhya Pradesh (see Chapter 8) reveals how local power dynamics can actually contribute towards a powerful VEC on the one hand and a fairly toothless SMC for the EGS (attended by the ST children) within the same village, resulting in differential outcomes for the schools in question.

Another strategy adopted in some states (notably Maharashtra,³ where one *sahyogini* is appointed for a cluster of schools, and Madhya Pradesh, where one *sahyogini* is appointed in each block) is the appointment of women animators whose primary responsibility is to forge closer linkages between the community and the school. Similarly, in districts where the GOI Mahila Samakhya Programme is operational, the local women's group (Mahila Samooh) and the *sahyogini* play this role.⁴ There is also some evidence, mainly from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, of support extended to the teachers and by Self-help Group members (see Chapter 13). It is not possible, however, to make any definitive statement in the absence of more information.

In some states the elected representatives of local bodies have been mobilised to promote girls' education (Mahila Sarpanch Sammelan of Gujarat is a case in point). As discussed in Chapter 5 on AS and EGS, many states have set up alternative schools to enable out-of-school girls to access basic education. Community mobilisation and sensitisation is done through various means. These special programmes run with community support are also part of the larger strategy to mobilise support for

Box 4.3

Illustrative list of awareness generation and community mobilisation materials

- Andhra Pradesh: Posters, audiotapes, magazines and newsletters developed. Children's drawings used for developing posters.
- Assam: Materials with gender focus in print/audio/video developed in two to three languages, and widely used. Songs and street plays prepared. Preparation of drama scripts in the Bongaigaon district.
- Bihar: 'Muniya Beti Padhti Jaye' audiotapes and calendars developed and distributed.
- Gujarat: Handbook for gender awareness, brochures on girls' education, documentation of mobilisation programmes organised at district level.
- Haryana: Poster, brochures, folders developed. Folders 'Balika Shiksha' for parents and teachers on the importance of educating girls. Audiotapes of 'Perna Geet' developed.
- Himachal Pradesh: Slogans. Highlighting importance of girls' education used. Calendars focusing on girls' education developed by Chamba and Sirmour districts. Audiotapes with songs on gender issues used in the Kullu district. Pamphlets on role of MTAs printed by Chamba district.
- Karnataka: Rural folk tales and stories by elders collected and compiled in a book, seven-module training film with in-built gender focus produced for training of teachers and VEC members. *Malka*, a film on girl child made by M.S. Sathyu, telecast on DD1 and DD9.
- Kerala: A write-up on gender issues included in the handbook developed for parents.
- Madhya Pradesh: Audiotapes on girls' education developed in Tikamgarh and Ratlam. Brochures on girls' education developed in Rajgarh and Shahdol, gender-specific awareness material scripts prepared.
- Maharashtra: Handbook for Sahyogini, Taluka Zila Mahila Sanchalika and programme personnel distributed up to school level.
- Orissa: Gender-sensitive printed material for MTAs, VECs and teachers. Leaflets displayed at *melas*, enrolment drive week and local festivals, posters and audiotapes produced.
- Tamil Nadu: Posters and stickers developed and distributed to all schools. Video cassettes on girls' education developed and screened in all districts.
- Uttar Pradesh: Posters, audiotapes, Abhiyan geet. Meena audiotapes, Mahila Samakhya bulletins and magazines made available to teachers and VECs.

Source: DPEP/GOI: *13th Joint Review Mission (Part 1)—Progress Overview Report*, April-May 2001; and DPEP/GOI: *Bringing Girls Centrestage*, Ed. CIL, November 2000.

basic education for all children—girls and boys. There is no comprehensive state-wise or national data available as yet (August 2001) on the extent and coverage of different community mobilisation programmes.

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

DPEP recognises the importance of a functioning crèche or pre-school as a necessary condition for child education, specifically for girls and ‘aims at strengthening existing provisions through the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), improving ECCE-primary school linkage, and opening up new centres only where ICDS is not yet in position, in order to avoid duplication’ (Kaul 2000: 26). Despite acknowledging the importance of pre-school education, research studies that have actually addressed the impact of these centres on the development of children’s cognitive abilities are non-existent. Scattered evidence from the field regarding the ICDS experience primarily indicates that these have been reduced to no more than ‘feeding centres’ (provision of the nutritional supplement seems to be their primary function) and some illustrate that ‘childcare facilities’ at the centre may directly have an impact on girls’ education in that they free the latter to attend school (PROBE Report 1999). Further, while at the national level DPEP has forged linkages with the ICDS programme, evidence from the field indicates that inter-sectoral coordination with the concerned department dealing with the ICDS programme at the state and district levels has not been as smooth.

As seen in the illustrative list (not comprehensive) below, there are also variations across states with respect to early childhood care and education in primary schools (DPEP 2000a, 2001a, 12th and 13th Joint Review Mission Reports):

- Andhra Pradesh: 2,180 ECE centres established and 8,042 schools covered under convergence programme with ICDS.
- Assam: 2,220 playschools started in non-ICDS areas and 1,047 schools covered through convergence with ICDS (DPEP 2000j).
- Bihar: 661 ECE centres established in 11 districts and convergence forged with 3,849 ICDS centres (DPEP 2001a).
- Haryana: 3,867 schools covered under convergence with ICDS.
- Kerala: 7,800 schools covered under convergence with ICDS centres and 53 pre-primary centres run by PTAs near primary schools.

- Madhya Pradesh: 4,008 Shishu Shiksha Kendras established in the primary school premises and 226 jhoolaghars (childcare centres).
- Maharashtra: 545 ECE centres set up under DPEP and 10,652 covered through convergence with ICDS.
- Tamil Nadu: 2,312 schools covered under convergence with ICDS.

These variations are not merely grist for the quantitative mill as they can often be a source of social inequity within the local context. A comparative look at the ECE centres in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh as revealed through the micro studies is rather illustrative of this. The more dominant village in Madhya Pradesh's 'ideal' panchayat has three functioning ECE centres—two anganwadis under ICDS and one Shishu Shiksha Kendra, the latter working in convergence with one of the anganwadis. While in another village of the same panchayat that has no ECE centre, motivated parents send children below six years to the local AS, adding to the burden of the school (see Chapter 8). Similarly, in Chhattisgarh, which until recently was a part of Madhya Pradesh, the panchayat visited can only boast of one dysfunctional anganwadi (see Chapter 9).

This kind of anecdotal evidence raises questions regarding the mechanism by which villages are targeted by DPEP. Is the selection needs-based, arbitrary or a response to the political clout exercised by the panchayat? What implications does this have for resource-poor villages/panchayats?

PEDAGOGY, CURRICULUM, CLASSROOM PROCESSES

DPEP has undoubtedly been one of the most ardent champions of change in pedagogy, textbooks and classroom processes. The programme has, in most areas, drawn upon the experiences of NGOs in education and adult literacy to bring about some change in the content and process of primary education in government schools in India. The broad focus of DPEP has primarily been on overhauling textbooks to make them more reader-friendly and to eliminate any social bias or stereotypes reflected by them that may be detrimental to the overall development of children. The process of doing this has been long drawn and facilitated through the convening of 'visioning workshops'. Several states (Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh among others) have taken the initiative to develop materials that are more relevant within their regional contexts (Shukla 2000). This process has also been accompanied by a shift towards a 'child-centred' pedagogy that views the process of learning as a celebration of childhood as opposed to a burden. In keeping with the

above trend, as captured in Table 4.1 a range of interesting initiatives have been tried out in DPEP districts.

TABLE 4.1
Engendering pedagogy and curriculum: Illustrative list of DPEP initiatives

Strategy	Activities
Generate and disseminate gender-sensitive textbooks and teaching-learning materials with a view to eliminate gender bias in textbooks and supplementary reading material.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assam: Textbook developers provided with checklist of ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’.• Bihar the teacher guides: ‘Sikhana Asan Hai’—distributed to all teachers in the DPEP district.• Himachal Pradesh state and district coordinators involved in textbook development. Women’s groups and women teachers participated in the process.• Haryana has completed revising textbooks of classes I to IV. Class V books are being tried in 850 schools. ‘Nanhe Kadam Vigyan Ki Aur’ and ‘Pitara Kholen Ank Bolen’ on science and maths circulated to all teachers (DPEP 2001a).• Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu have revised the textbooks of classes I to IV.• Madhya Pradesh NGOs, district gender coordinators, schoolteachers are involved in revision of textbooks for classes I to V and integrated books introduced in 2000.• Tamil Nadu: minority language textbooks prepared for classes II and III.• Uttar Pradesh district-level Gender Coordinators, representatives of Mahila Samakhya, schoolteachers made part of SRG for revising textbooks and TLM—Indra Dhanush I, II, III: supplementary reading material (DPEP 2000e).
Eliminate gender bias in classroom, use of activity-based books and material, to create a child-friendly environment in the classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Andhra Pradesh: Gender component integrated in teacher training and 24,102 primary teachers trained in phase I, 63,277 primary teachers trained for seven days in phase II districts (DPEP 2001a).• Bihar: Gender issues integrated in teachers’ training—83,043 teachers trained in Ujala-I, 43,190 teachers trained in Ujala-II.• Gujarat: Gender awareness training given to 3,897 female teachers of Panchamahals, 2,699 of Banaskantha and 447 of Dangs. 13,661 teachers trained for TLM preparation material, 6,556 teachers trained on new textbooks for class I and 5,600 teachers trained for class II textbooks (DPEP 2001a).• Haryana: Gender training through Dasha and Disha packages—10,000 teachers trained on classes I and II textbooks

in first round, in second round about 9,000 teachers trained on class III, IV and V textbooks.

- Himachal Pradesh: About 7,500 teachers trained for minimum of 15 days.
- Karnataka: Gender concerns integrated in in-service training programme, 34,594 teachers trained for six days in phase I districts from 1998–2001. 54,026 teachers got trained in phase II districts.
- Kerala: 30,000 teachers received training for more than 90 days and gender sensitisation integrated in general training (ibid.).
- Madhya Pradesh: Gender sensitisation module integrated in teacher training programme. About 1.5 lakh primary school teachers trained in phase I and II districts. About 85,000 Gurujis trained.
- Orissa: Almost all categories of teachers have gone through three rounds of teacher training programme—one-day training in gender issues.
- Uttar Pradesh: Shikshodaya, 10-day module for teachers provides one day for girls' education. During 1997–98 and 1998–99, 51,236 teachers trained in phase I districts, 4,916 teachers are trained in phase II districts. 'SABAL' package for teacher training is finalised (April–May 2001).
- West Bengal: Gender training module published along with handbook, 5,065 teachers covered in two gender focus blocks in three districts. In South 24 Parganas district, 110 teachers sensitised on gender issues.

Teacher-support
Material: To eliminate
gender bias in
classroom.

- Seven module film 'Before we begin the lesson ...' along with three days' training for teachers.
- Andhra Pradesh: Training module 'Amma Nenu Badiki Potha' (ibid.).
- Assam: Two booklets on educating girls and a compilation of stories of girl recipients of national bravery awards.
- Bihar: 'Shikhana Asan Hai' deals with gender issues.
- Himachal Pradesh: 'Integrated Teacher Training Module' being used in revised teachers' training.
- Karnataka: *Chiguru*, a resource book for teachers, and *Manthana*, a resource book for trainers of teachers.
- Orissa: Handout on 'Why Girls' Education and Gender Issues in Primary Education' distributed to BRCCs.

Girls' friendly classroom
processes

- Kerala and Gujarat: This component has been included in the teachers' training.
 - Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal: Selected blocks or clusters developed as models.
-

Despite a substantial effort, there is no comprehensive assessment of the impact of these strategies on retention of girls in school or the elimination of gender bias in both curriculum and the classroom. Studies on classroom processes that have been done so far are not sensitive to gender issues as revealed in the objectives and methodology of the studies. Chapter 6 (in this book) highlights the issue that DPEP is yet to conduct research to assess the impact of these inputs.

What is also significant is that social attitudes towards children from disadvantaged groups have not been addressed in a systematic manner. These observations are borne out by the independent micro studies on six DPEP states included in this book.

TARGETING GIRLS AND SOCIALLY MARGINAL GROUPS

As mentioned earlier, DPEP has several interventions that specifically tackle the issue of gender and social equity in access, participation and retention in primary education. These initiatives range from free textbooks to scholarships and in some cases a provision for escort services for girls. Some of these initiatives are given in Box 4.4.

Despite the noble intentions of these initiatives, the impact generated has been limited either because of their piecemeal nature or localised emphasis. Introduction of specific programmes/activities is largely dependent on the personal commitment of state or district-level officials. There is no comprehensive information on coverage and almost no data/qualitative information on the impact of localised initiatives. The November 2000 Ed.CIL/GOI publication lists a range of innovations and state-specific strategies and lays out the intent of the government. However, the extent and spread of these strategies and their impact has not been covered.

An initiative that stands out from the rest because of its scope as well as documented impact on expanding access to primary schools, particularly among girls, SC, ST and other special focus groups are the AS/EGS initiatives across the different DPEP states. The introduction of these schools has ensured that this movement is well underway in primary education. It has reached small habitations with no schools and has attempted to bring back out-of-school children, dropouts and working children. The scope and expanse of the EGS/AS is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Box 4.4

Illustrative list of targeted initiatives for girls and socially marginalised groups

- Extra coaching provision in classes to improve learning outcomes in order to support first-generation learners and help children from disadvantaged communities—Documentation available indicates that in phase I and II districts in Tamil Nadu, 2,482 coaching centres are running and 62,995 girls have benefited. In Dharmapuri, Tamil Nadu, special coaching classes for ST girls are also held covering 196 schools and 6,871 girls. A similar strategy is recorded for Uttar Pradesh, but no information on coverage is available.
- Escort service for girls to encourage enrolment and prevent absenteeism—Again, there is scattered coverage in Uttar Pradesh but no concrete data. However, Tamil Nadu records it in three districts—Dharmapuri, Cuddalore and Thiruvannamalai (25 schools in one block of each district). This has had a positive impact and there has been a rise in the level of enrolment of girls—6.93 per cent in Dharmapuri, 6.85 per cent in Cuddalore and 8 per cent in Thiruvannamalai.
- Free books given as incentives for girls and children from SC and ST communities to encourage the participation of girls in primary education—This strategy is more uniformly evident and is present in all DPEP districts in Bihar and Himachal Pradesh for classes I to V and in Kerala for classes II to V (DPEP 2000j). Other one-time efforts have been the distribution of 2,763,606 free textbooks to girls in 18 DPEP-II districts in Uttar Pradesh in one year. In Maharashtra, in two blocks of Osmanabad, girls in class I get free textbooks and writing materials. All of Haryana is covered by this scheme.
- Scholarships for SC children in Uttar Pradesh of Rs 25 per month up till class V, which increases to Rs 40 in the middle school—In Tamil Nadu, SC girls studying in class V receive Rs 500 per year as an incentive for completing each year of primary schooling.
- Textbooks and TLM developed in tribal languages and other pedagogic support—Bihar—for classes I to V in Santhali, Ho, Mundari and Uraon. In Assam (Goalpara district) Garo medium workbook translated and Karbi language book Lam-chilli Part I and II introduced in the Karbi and Anglong districts. In Madhya Pradesh (Jhabua district) supplementary TLM introduced in 178 schools in Jobat block and 133 schools of Udaigarh blocks, four tribal primers namely Bonda and Koya, Kui and Santali developed and picture dictionaries in these languages are being prepared. In Gujarat 200 flashcards (figure cards and counting cards) distributed in tribal area schools and dictionaries under preparation in

(Box 4.4 contd)

Panchamahala and Banaskantha. In Andhra Pradesh bilingual primers developed for four tribal dialects—Gond, Kolani, Banjara, Saavara. In Karnataka (Mysore district) MLL textbooks for class I in the Soliga language developed and introduced handbook for sensitising teachers towards social and cultural specificity of tribal communities developed.

- Other initiatives for children belonging to households who engage in seasonal migration targeted in the drive for UEE through seasonal hostels, bridge courses, farm schools etc. Seasonal hostels are limited to nine ashramshalas and 14 hostels in Gujarat. In Dang district, 10 centres for bridge courses have been introduced which cover about 100 children.

Sources: DPEP 2000b, *12th Joint Review Mission (part 2) State Reports, Bringing Girls Centrestage*, Ed.CIL, November 2000; DPEP/GOI: *In Perspective Improving Girls Access to a Better Life through Primary Education*, Ed.CIL August 1997; DPEP (2000e) (Uttar Pradesh) *Making a Difference*, UPBEP/GOI, Lucknow.

DISABILITY AND INTEGRATED EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT (IED)

This is a fairly new area in DPEP and the programme is still attempting to come to grips with the issue and work out ways and means to address it. As of 13th Joint Review Mission (DPEP 2001a), this component has not been integrated into all the districts. Notwithstanding this observation, given our track record of 54 years of neglect of disabled children in mainstream primary education, DPEP has indeed made a good beginning. First, surveys of disabled children have been undertaken in many areas, as can be seen from Box 4.5.

IMPACT OF MIDDAY MEALS—MIXED EVIDENCE

There is no doubt that the fluctuating status with respect to midday meals, the three-kilogram rice scheme has left its mark on school enrolment. In many states it has led to an unprecedented increase in enrolment in primary schools (see Chapter 12). A large number of underage children are also enrolled, leading to higher detention rates in class I. The PROBE Report (1999) noted that ‘most teachers in PROBE states felt that these incentive schemes were of great benefit to disadvantaged children, mainly in terms of enhancing enrolment and attendance. Parents

Box 4.5

Identification of disabled children in DPEP

- Andhra Pradesh: 2,516 children identified in 438 *mandals*, 308 supplied with aids and appliances.
- Assam: Five clusters in three districts covered and 9,331 children identified, 3,477 enrolled in schools, 148 aids and appliances provided.
- Bihar: 4,271 children identified, 3,384 enrolled and 180 aids and appliances provided.
- Gujarat, Dang, Panchamahar and Banaskantha: 4,271 children identified, 3,384 enrolled.
- Haryana: Survey completed in DPEP districts, 13,923 identified, 13,053 enrolled.
- Himachal Pradesh: 33 blocks covered in four districts and 2,627 identified and 2,429 enrolled.
- Karnataka: 17 blocks in 16 districts covered and 2,627 identified and 2,429 enrolled.
- Kerala: 8,659 identified in six districts, 3,294 provided with aids and appliances.
- Madhya Pradesh: 64,861 identified and 19,021 children enrolled.
- Maharashtra: 32,180 identified, 19,186 enrolled in all districts.
- Orissa: One block chosen in all the eight districts, 27,313 identified, 17,438 enrolled.
- Tamil Nadu: 14,549 identified in seven districts, 13,552 enrolled, 998 provided with aids and appliances.
- Uttar Pradesh: 52,173 identified, 31,798 enrolled, 816 received aids and appliances.
- West Bengal: 8,545 identified, 4,356 enrolled (November 2000) and 537 aids and appliances supplied.

Source: 12th and 13th Joint Review Mission Reports, (DPEP 2000, 2001).

tended to share this view.... Thus, the potential usefulness of the incentive scheme is not in doubt. The main problem seems to be their tokenist implementation, and incentives are supplied in an erratic manner.' While some states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu distribute cooked meals, most states have adopted the 'dry ration' system whereby 3 kilograms of rice are given to every child, provided she/he maintains an 80 per cent attendance. However, in reality it is not possible for the teacher to refuse grain to children from very poor households, even if they fall short of attendance. The PROBE report also revealed that in large parts of Bihar rations were not released in 1996. Similar reports have been received from parts of Orissa as well.

What then is the impact of incentives in the form of dry rations or midday meals? When the scheme works well, the impact is palpable. But when it is withdrawn, or if the supply is irregular, or (as in Chhattisgarh, Chapter 9) when panchayat leaders give differential treatment to different schools in the same village, it leads to a decrease in attendance (even though the child may continue to be enrolled). 'Many villagers, in order to avail of the benefits, start sending their children to government schools. This unduly affects the enrolment trends. Part of the problem of recent decline in intake at Grade I level is attributed to the introduction/withdrawal or suspension of incentive schemes in various parts of the country' (Aggarwal 2000b, Chapter 9).

The six micro studies done in this programme also point towards the negative impact of a badly managed incentive scheme. In areas where the midday meal is served regularly and is of reasonable quality, attendance rates have shown an appreciable improvement. Handing over the management to panchayats, as in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, frees the teacher and transfers the onus to the panchayat and this practice, too, has met with success. On the other hand, badly managed/irregular schemes can lead to fluctuations in attendance, especially when the teacher is irregular and the school dysfunctional. However, in these cases latent conflicts are also manifested in the differential treatment to schools.

Distributing rice through Public Distribution System (PDS) shops could increase formal enrolment and yet show little impact on attendance, particularly in areas where the school is dysfunctional.

TEACHERS: MORE WOMEN AND FROM SC AND ST GROUPS

Building, blackboard, TLM, midday meals and other incentives and facilities are meaningless in the absence of motivated teachers. Given high levels of politicisation, strikes and pending litigation in the courts, people from all walks of life blame the teachers for poor-quality education in government schools. The DPEP teachers we talked to admitted that their own self-esteem is low and they see themselves as cogs in the huge machinery of the government. In the last 10 years there have been several efforts to rationalise teacher deployment and introduce localised recruitment. A number of states have introduced a new cadre of 'parateachers' or 'contract teachers' as they have come to be known in DPEP. The prevailing fiscal situation in most states and the increasing pressure on the government to reduce expenditure, mainly the recurring liability on staff, has created an environment where teachers (in some areas lower

qualifications) are recruited on a contract basis and posted in primary schools. Many states report that these teachers are not only from the region, but are drawn from the more disadvantaged communities. Significant proportions of them are women, with some states like West Bengal making it mandatory to recruit women over the age of 40.

One of the recurring policy recommendations to improve girls' participation is the recruitment of female teachers.⁵ Notwithstanding policy-level commitments and clearly articulated strategies in DPEP, deployment of female teachers in rural and remote areas has continued to be a big problem across the country. Schools continue to be clustered around urban areas. For example, while 33 per cent or more teachers are women in Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu (27 per cent in Maharashtra, 26 per cent in Assam and Uttar Pradesh, 25 per cent in Madhya Pradesh, 23 per cent in Orissa, 22 per cent in Bihar and 17 per cent in West Bengal)—they continue to be clustered around urban areas. In Tamil Nadu 86.8 per cent and 89.4 per cent single-teacher schools are without any female teachers in phase I and phase II districts and 70.1 per cent and 72 per cent of two-teacher schools are without a woman teacher. In Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat 30 per cent to 45 per cent of female teachers are in urban areas. Less than 30 per cent of the female teachers work in rural areas in Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal (DPEP 2000j).

Why are women teachers reluctant to go to rural areas? One study pointed out that, 'More than half of the female teachers reported problems in schools. Lack of cooperation from male teachers was highest in Sehore (50 per cent), Tikamgarh (42.9 per cent), Nanded (26.7 per cent) and Hisar (25.6 per cent) districts.... Lack of separate toilets and availability of residential accommodation in schools were reported in all the districts ...' (Jangira and Yadav 1994). The situation is much worse in the more backward regions of the country. Here, safety of women teachers remains an emotional issue and the attitude of their male colleagues only compounds the problem. While there is near unanimity—at least in India—on the positive impact of female teachers in relation to the participation of girls, researchers and observers point out that a local person, whom the community trusts and who is regular can make as significant an impact. Conversely, frequent teacher absenteeism makes parents apprehensive about leaving their daughters unattended (in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, for example), leading to higher dropout rates (Srivastava 2001). Similarly, the caste and residence of teachers is said to influence participation.

There is another side to the picture. Some researchers argue that regularity, commitment and motivation matter more at the primary stage. A study sponsored by UNICEF shows that the

sex of the teacher does not seem to matter to the children, it appears to matter less to the parents in the urban sample as compared to parents in the rural sample. When asked if girls should be taught by a female or male teacher, nearly 70 per cent of the urban parents in all the sample states, say that the sex of the teacher does not matter. It must be noted here that across states, there are relatively more female teachers in urban areas as compared to rural areas. Parents in the rural sample in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh express similar sentiments. In rural Madhya Pradesh and rural Bihar, nearly half of the parents feel that girls should be taught by a female teacher. The ratio of male to female teachers is skewed towards male teachers in rural Madhya Pradesh and Bihar (4:1 and 5:1). By contrast there are more female teachers in the rural areas of the remaining three states and the urban areas of all the five states (MODE Research 1995).

This observation has been confirmed in Madhya Pradesh (EGS), Rajasthan (Shiksha Karmi Project) and in a number of AS where recruitment of a local person and monitoring by a village committee has inspired confidence, leading to an increased participation of girls. As discussed in Chapter 2, the 1990s saw a sharp increase in the enrolment of girls across the country. With the exception of Karnataka, DPEP states have not addressed teacher grievances/motivation or morale building.⁶

OTHER STRATEGIES

Among the strategies mentioned in DPEP is encouraging flexible timings and appropriate calendars, specifically in AS and EGS. This, it is argued, will enable working children to attend school and also improve girls' participation. However, since the launching of DPEP, another debate eclipsed the timing and calendar issue—namely, the right to education of children (especially child workers) and the meaninglessness of non-formal education for two hours a day. Evidence from Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and from most other areas has shown that parents are willing to send their children to full-time schools. While the rhythm of holidays needs to be matched with agricultural cycles, there is near unanimity on the issue of full-time schooling. However, a review

of DPEP reports shows that (with the exception of EGS in Madhya Pradesh perhaps) school timings are fixed by the administration.⁷

Valuable innovations are reported to have made a difference, though their coverage is limited, such as state-specific programmes like:

- Model Cluster Development Approach (15 clusters in Uttar Pradesh).
- Nali Kali (one block each in DPEP districts and total coverage in Mysore, Karnataka).
- Shiksha Mitra: female parateacher (no details on coverage, Uttar Pradesh).
- Attendance monitoring in low female literacy areas (475 villages in Andhra Pradesh).
- Rajput Sammelan to promote girls' education (118 villages in Banaskantha, Gujarat).

SUMMING UP

The DISE and EMIS system developed in DPEP is expected to capture both the 'inputs' and 'outputs', i.e., the progress on gender and social equity issues. While an exciting range of innovations has been initiated and mechanisms introduced to make the system work, it is not possible to make a comprehensive assessment of gender and social equity issues on the basis of the data/information available in DPEP. For example, the following limitations are evident:

- While there is data (mostly in reports prepared for JRMs) on schools with pre-primary facilities, there is almost no information on the number of children in these centres and whether the inter-sectoral linkages with ICDS are working. What little data is available is not disaggregated by gender or social groups.
- While there is data (at the state level) on the number of girls, SC and ST children receiving textbooks and other incentives, the date of supply/distribution is not mentioned. Erratic supply has been reported in many areas—on items like dry rations and in some states even textbooks and uniforms.
- The number of children repeating each class, disaggregated by social group and gender is not available in most states. This data is disaggregated by gender, but not by both social group and gender. In many states this data is not available for wider dissemination.

- The IED programme has been introduced in select blocks in DPEP districts. DPEP officials admit that EMIS designed at the start of the programme did not include this as a category. This is being corrected in the new, redesigned EMIS.
- Recruitment, deployment and availability of women teachers—by rural and urban categories are tabulated every year. Similarly, the proportion of female teachers to head teachers is also available and tabulated to capture disparities within the system, but this information is not available for researchers. The proportion of no-female-teacher schools to total schools (by single-teacher, two-teacher schools) is also tabulated. However, if this were aggregated by area (tribal, semi-urban, remote, rural, etc.) it might reveal an interesting picture.
- Available information on VECs, MTAs and SBC is inadequate.

Perhaps the most important contribution to gender and social equity in DPEP is the official recognition that multiple strategies are necessary to reach out to the unreached. In 1992–93, when the programme was being formulated and during the first two years there was considerable resistance from donors to the very idea of alternative schools. The programme has continuously tried to integrate innovations that resulted in positive experiences and positive impact. This, many observers point out, has been the biggest strength of DPEP. For example, the spectacular impact of the Madhya Pradesh EGS, the path-breaking work on bridge courses by the M.V. Foundation (Andhra Pradesh) and other NGOs (that were part of the National Child Labour Programme) together with empirical evidence from DPEP phase I districts strengthened the hands of the government enough to introduce alternative strategies as an integral part of DPEP.

With alternative schools came parateachers. The Shiksha Karmi Project of Rajasthan brought home the importance of locally acceptable and accessible teachers. It was the Madhya Pradesh-EGS scheme that really drove this model to scale. It provided the government with a solution to the high cost of primary education, by creating yet another cadre of parateachers, thereby reducing the fiscal burden of state governments. There is some debate on whether this is detrimental in the long term and whether it promotes the larger interest of gender and social equity. On the face of it, one could argue that girls and children from unserved habitations and also from disadvantaged communities finally have access to a functioning school and that (given the dismal state of rural primary schools), there is

no significant difference in quality. Several studies that have been done on the parateachers' programme record comparable, if not better, achievements in formal primary schools. This issue is discussed at length in Chapter 5.

An area of concern that has been flagged by donors and research is the shortage of independent research-based information on the impact of DPEP in India, as most of the assessments/studies have either been commissioned or have been done in-house. Such reports do not throw light on the internal working of the system nor do they tell us whether and where strategies that were spelt out at the beginning of the programme in 1994 were implemented. Reports prepared for JRMs reveal selective implementation of a number of DPEP strategies targeted specifically for special focus groups. The JRM has been an important mechanism to review gender issues in DPEP. It has been successful in flagging gender as an important monitoring indicator and bringing it to centrestage in DPEP. The very fact that district- and block-level officers are called upon to report on gender issues on a regular basis has created a positive climate for change.

Unfortunately, this has not been the case with special focus groups, particularly in relation to the most difficult to reach groups. Institutional mechanisms and strategies need to be specifically designed to mainstream social equity issues. In view of the compelling evidence (see Chapters 2 and 3) that it is the poor who access government schools, monitoring social equity should be a priority in India.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX TABLE 4.1
Gender and social equity issues and effectiveness of strategies adopted in DPEPs^s

<i>Gender and social equity issue</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Programme/Programme activity</i>	<i>Feedback on impact</i>
Universal access—special focus on enrolling girls and children from disadvantaged groups.	Mobilise the community to play a proactive role in enrolling and monitoring the attendance of children. Formation of village education committees to support, monitor and encourage/motivate families to send their daughters to school. In some areas VEC functions include supervising constructing, mobilising funds, appointing parateachers, monitoring and participating in micro planning.	Environment building through <i>kala-jatha</i> rallies, campaigns, enrolment drives and similar activities. Constitute VECs. Training of teachers and administrators, who can facilitate the formation of VECs. Ensure that a specified percentage of members are women and representatives of SC and ST groups. Village-level training workshops for effective participation of women. Civil works through involvement of VEC to ensure quality and maintenance. AS and EGS schools to reach out to the under-served and unserved habitations, special groups and children who are out of school.	Quite effective in the short run, needs to be sustained through regular/ongoing activities. Evidence from 42 DPEP-I—problem of ensuring participation of women members remains, and not all districts have set up systems to train and motivate women VEC members. Sequence of implementation of training and capacity building of members is neglected. Mixed feedback—in some areas the VEC has played a key role. Toilets have been provided in some areas. EGS and AS have together made a significant impact in unserved habitations and enhanced access, especially

Bridge courses and back-to-school camps to enable out-of-school children/child workers to get back into the mainstream.	Andhra Pradesh has gone to scale with bridge courses in collaboration with NGOs like the M.V. Foundation.	Over 4.5 lakh children have been covered through bridge courses, as of August 2001.
Convergence of inputs of different education programmes (OBB, Mahila Samakhya and TLC), women's development and child development programmes.	Create coordination mechanisms to establish linkages with other services, programmes, NGOs etc.	Evidence of close linkages with Mahila Samakhya. Evidence also of lack of effective coordination with ICDS and other women's programmes of the government.
More female teachers.	Gradually increase the proportion of women teachers in DPEP districts. Proactive policies to encourage women teachers.	The proportion of women teachers has gone up from 29.6 per cent in DPEP-I districts in 1996-97 to 34.1 per cent in 1998-99. There are wide variations; West Bengal with the least with 17.3 per cent in 1998-99, while Tamil Nadu recorded 56.6 per cent and Karnataka the highest with 73.5 per cent. The distribution, however, is skewed in favour of urban and semi-urban areas.

(Appendix Table 4.1 contd)

(Appendix Table 4.1 *contd*)

<i>Gender and social equity issue</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Programme/Programme activity</i>	<i>Feedback on impact</i>
	Incentives—textbooks, uniforms, midday meals, dry rations, etc. Special provisions—like escorts, support services, etc. Awards and recognition to VECs, MTAs, panchayats and teachers for exceptional work in reaching out to unreached children and bringing them to school.	State-specific provision for incentives and special provisions—no national norm.	All the states have a range of incentives and support programmes. However, DPEP resources only provide free textbooks for SC and ST girls. Mixed feedback on midday meals, mostly on effectiveness of implementation. Need systematic/time series assessment of impact of incentives on girls' education.
Improve the quality of education—improving the supply side.	Improve school environment and make the place attractive and exciting for children. Make learning a joyful exercise with the expectation that quality improvement will have a positive impact on first-generation learners.	Provide funds to teachers to improve classroom environment and teaching learning aids—posters, charts etc. Pedagogic renewal process—make available competency-based TLM. Encourage innovations in invigorating the school environment.	Positive evidence—learning outcomes of children in such schools showing marked improvement. Baseline assessment survey (1997) and mid-term assessment survey (2000) reveal that learning outcomes vary across the states and even within each state, with contextual factors exerting considerable influence.
	Review curriculum, improve TLM and screen them for gender and social biases.	Regular activities/workshops on curriculum, development of TLM. Structured workshops to review textbooks for gender and social biases.	Evidence of renewed debate on curriculum right up to the district level. Variations across states.

Key role of the TSG of the EE Bureau in setting this process in motion.	No direct gender impact study available and existing classroom processes/studies have not focused on gender and social issues.
Involvement of NCERT and similar state-level bodies.	Again, significant district and state variations, problem of availability of trained/motivated people.
Need for academic support institutions to initiate and sustain the pedagogic renewal process in the districts.	No gender or social impact assessment available.
Making the system responsive to gender and social equity issues—management of DPEP.	The gender units have been very active and reports of regular meetings of gender coordinators shared with Education Secretaries and DPEP-SPD.
Establish gender units/appoint gender coordinators from the district level right up to the national level.	EMIS data analysed regularly.
Gender coordinators to play a critical interventionist role in the programme by participating in planning, training and monitoring activities.	Independent research on access, retention and documentation of AS plans from a gender perspective.
	Organise meetings, conventions and other activities to mobilise women and also sensitise functionaries and teachers.
	Evidence of active participation of gender unit in regular monitoring by the government.
	This does not apply to the issue of other community mobilisation activities.
	Monitor the constitution of VEC and other community mobilisation activities.

(Appendix Table 4.1 contd)

Gender and social equity issue	Strategy	Programme/Programme activity	Feedback on impact
		Forge linkages with Mahila Samakhya and other women's programmes/ NGO activities.	the system responsive to the needs of first-generation learners, most of whom are from marginalised groups within SCs and STs.
		Baseline data and regular EMIS to include gender disaggregated data. Reporting systems to include innovations and alternative models that have made a difference.	While considerable gender and social class disaggregated data is available in DPEP, this is not the case at the pre-school level. Few states (Karnataka) compile information disaggregated by social category and gender. Regular gender-specific compilation and analysis of EMIS data is necessary—this was done in 1998. EMIS data not disaggregated jointly by social class and gender.
Joint Review Missions to regularly monitor gender impact and also the impact on socially disadvantaged communities.		Gender issues monitored in every Joint Review Mission, however, social access issues (particularly of the most deprived and unreached) not monitored with the same degree.	This has been an effective mechanism—and instrumental in flagging gender and social equity (to a lesser extent) issues. Gender unit reported that they were greatly strengthened by this proactive agenda of JRMIs. Social equity issues not monitored with the same intensity.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Aarti Saihjee for her inputs and editorial support in this chapter; they were very valuable.
2. For example Sahyogini and Mahila Samooh of Mahila Samakhya Programme (of GOI)—specifically in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh—note that VECs are not vibrant community-level structures. Self-help Group members in Tamil Nadu (Dharmapuri) and Andhra Pradesh (Nellore) confirm this observation. No studies are available on the effectiveness of VECs.
3. Maharashtra also introduced the Mahila Prabodhan Programme for awareness generation and to monitor the access and retention of girls in schools. However, there are no details on implementation or impact.
4. For example in Uttar Pradesh, Mahila Samakhya runs 223 Bal Kendra (crèche/pre-school) in seven districts and six Mahila Shikshan Kendras. In Bihar, Mahila Samakhya has formed Jag Jagi Kendra—adolescent girls, groups and participates in VEC training. In Karnataka, the programme supports micro planning.
5. Among the reasons discussed in the PROBE Report are that smaller children are more comfortable with women teachers, they are less brutal and their presence could reduce endemic violence in government schools, it leads to balanced socialisation of girls and boys and that they provide role models to young girls in the community (PROBE Report 1999).
6. 'Since launching DPEP, the administration has tried to address teacher grievances and streamline cadre management. To this end, the government introduced a transparent system to manage recruitment, transfer and deployment of teachers. There was also a spurt in teacher recruitment. Over one lakh teachers were recruited between 1993 and 1999—50 per cent of who were women. The cadre was also young and receptive. As a result, the larger educational climate was not one of despair, but of hope and optimism. Administrators did not seek to bypass the mainstream but worked towards bringing about systemic change. This was in keeping with the overall thrust of DPEP' Vimala Ramachandran in 'Nali Kali—Revitalising Primary Education through Pedagogic Renewal' in *Getting Children Back to School—Case Studies in Primary Education* (2003).
7. While Uttar Pradesh mentions school timings as a girl-friendly strategy, there is no information on coverage.
8. This appendix was originally prepared by the author of this chapter for the European Commission Education Programme Office in October 2000 and was revised/updated in September 2001 for this programme.

5 ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION GUARANTEE SCHEME

Azib Ghosh

It has long been recognised that the expanding formal school system could not keep pace with the need to provide primary education to the large number of children in the age-group of 6–14 years, especially in rural areas, and the goal of achieving UEE by 1960 (within 10 years of the formation of the Republic of India) was a dismal failure. The Education Commission (1964–66) recommended that a non-formal system of education should be introduced with flexible timings and a shorter curriculum to reach the out-of-school children (GOI 1967). The centrally sponsored scheme of Non-formal Education (NFE) was introduced in 1979–80 on a pilot basis with a view to support the formal system in providing education to all children up to the age of 14 years as enunciated in the directive principles of the Constitution. Subsequently, the NFE scheme was expanded to cover the 10 educationally backward states of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. However, it was still hoped that the formal system would eventually catch up and cover the whole country. The NFE scheme continued to remain just a weak apology of a programme and no serious thought was given to the problem of addressing the educational needs of the poor and marginalised.

The NPE (GOI 1986: 12) with its urgent focus on equal opportunity for girls and SC/ST children, recognised that the school could not reach all children. It envisaged that a 'large and systematic programme of NFE would be required for school dropouts, for children from habitations without schools, working children and girls who could not attend whole-day schools'. The revised NFE scheme envisaged in the NPE Programme of Action continued to focus on the 10 educationally backward states, but also included urban slums, hilly, tribal and desert areas and projects for

working children in other states and Union Territories (GOI 1986). In the new NFE scheme, grants were provided for Voluntary Agencies (VA) directly from the central government for running NFE centres and a part of the funds was made available for innovative and experimental projects of VA in this area.

Thus it would appear that the government came to accept the ground reality that higher investments in formal education were not immediately feasible and that the formal school system's track record of reaching the 'hard-to-reach' children was poor. Hence, the second track of NFE became necessary and the scheme had to be opened up to VA or NGOs since the education departments at the centre and the states were unable to break out of the rigid mould of the formal school system and its structures. This brief recount of the evolution of the NFE scheme till the end of the 1980s bears testimony to the denial of a critical social entitlement based on the principle of equity/equality enshrined in the Constitution of India.

However, the opening up of the NFE scheme to NGOs and the renewed commitment of NPE (GOI 1986) served to draw attention to the circumstances and needs of these poor, disadvantaged and marginalised children and the imperative to provide them with primary education. In Rajasthan, the Shiksha Karmi project evolved out of a successful pilot experiment by an NGO focusing on training community-based teacher-activists. Shiksha Karmis taught children using the existing premises of primary schools (Ramachandran and Sethi 2001). Here, owing to remote locations, usually inhabited by poor and marginalised groups, teacher absenteeism was prevalent. Much innovative work was done during this period to introduce NFE in tribal areas by starting night schools for working children and experimenting with new activity-based pedagogy, as well as garnering community support for these programmes.

The quality of work done by several NGOs showed the way to reach out to the 'hard to reach' albeit on a limited scale. It was therefore opportune that the Jomtien declaration of Education for All (EFA) by 2000 came in 1990 and gave a further impetus to the expressed concern to reach out to the disadvantaged and marginalised. The social mobilisation around adult literacy through the TLC and its early success during 1990–92 created a widespread demand for primary education even among non-literate (or neo-literate) parents (GOI 1994). Girls, in particular, showed great eagerness to come forward to participate in whatever basic education programme—literacy, NFE or primary school—was available within reach.

It is against this backdrop that DPEP, with its massive investment in improving/strengthening the educational infrastructure in several states,

was formulated in 1994. Other large projects that can be considered forerunners to DPEP, such as Lok Jumbish (LJ) in Rajasthan, Bihar Education Project (BEP), Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Project (UPBEP) and Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project (APPEP), were tried out on a fairly large scale in select districts and blocks. They drew on the innovative experiences of NFE, the Shiksha Karmi Project, Mahila Samakhya and the social mobilisation efforts through TLCs. It was accepted that the local community had to be involved in running the school and that teachers needed to be drawn from the local community since they displayed greater understanding and sensitivity to local needs and therefore the community accepted them more easily. Relevant pedagogy and attractive textbooks and other TLM were also widely experimented with in these projects. Above all, these projects made serious efforts to reach out to girls and the other disadvantaged like the marginalised poor and working children.

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLING IN DPEP

Riding on the rich field experience and evidence from surveys and research studies, DPEP was formulated as a strategy for decentralised planning and implementation of a time-bound primary education programme with well-defined objectives (GOI 1995). It aimed at providing a primary school of reasonable quality within 1 kilometre of every child and ensuring that every child attended school regularly and achieved measurable competencies. Equity was a key thrust area and girls and SC/ST children were to be given special attention. In keeping with its concern for quality and improvement in the efficiency of the system, DPEP laid considerable emphasis on improving school infrastructure, teacher training, pedagogic renewal, academic support through CRCs/BRCs and community involvement.

Initially, AS were reluctantly accepted as being necessary only for some special categories of working children, for those living in difficult terrains or children of families migrating seasonally in search of work. This meant developing specific strategies to meet the particular needs of the different groups. Involvement of NGOs with experience in non-formal education and/or experience of working with children under difficult circumstances was encouraged in some states—where flexibility in approach was advocated with regard to the selection of teachers, their training, community support and supervision, academic support to teachers, textbooks and TLM. However, the nagging question of providing primary education to

all children and reaching out to the large numbers of children in small habitations without a formal school remained a vital issue for DPEP, even though it was not addressed in this manner. There was a feeling that the provision of a functioning school and improving quality would, by and large, address the issue of access in most areas. As a result the AS programme that was agreed upon had a dual focus:

- Providing AS in small, unserviced habitations (population below 300) that do not qualify for a formal school.
- A variety of AS programmes for children unable to participate in formal schools due to a number of socio-economic and cultural barriers.

Accordingly the states were to have the freedom to design their own AS strategies to provide primary-level schooling to all children who are out of school (Ed.CIL 1999). While DPEP's AS programme prioritises small and remote habitations with 20 to 30 children that do not have a school within a kilometre radius, many states adopted other strategies for mainstreaming children to the formal school system. These range from NFE centres and residential camps for older children (in order to encourage them to complete their primary education) to bridge courses for smaller out-of-school children in the 6–8 age-group to help them get back to the formal school. Coupled with a social mobilisation effort to enrol all children in schools or AS programmes, this approach has been extensively applied in Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and recently in Karnataka. By and large, however, the states have been hesitant to extend the AS programme because of the uncertainty regarding the continuance of financial support after DPEP. This has affected not only the extension of the AS programme beyond the very small experimental size projects in a few blocks but also limited the financial inputs necessary to ensure quality of education provided under it.

The characteristics that can be found in the Alternative Schooling Programme (ASP) under DPEP are discussed next.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT THROUGH HOUSEHOLD SURVEY AND MICRO PLANNING

Some states have used habitation-wise household surveys by involving the community to get a complete picture of the number of out-of-school

children and the reasons for their non-enrolment and dropout. In some areas, micro planning exercises formed the basis for identifying the different categories of children and designing specific strategies to address their needs. In other areas micro planning is essentially a tool to collect information and it has not included participation of the community in identifying needs and planning for a school. There is no uniformity across the country and observers rightly point out that localised strategies are necessary. In the last two years Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka have used household-survey data as an effective instrument to assess needs not only for more schools but to also get a more realistic picture of participation in schools. Decisions to introduce bridge courses or AS/EGS are largely based on this information.

DIVERSITY AND FLEXIBILITY

As the AS programme evolved, a wide range of strategies were tried out in various parts of the country. Some, like EGS, emerged independently and were soon made an integral part of DPEP. Similarly, bridge courses were essentially an NGO model to get out-of-school children back to school. Broadly, the following needs-specific strategies emerged in the different states:

- **Full-time schools for children of remote and unserved habitations**—community schools serving the tribal and coastal areas of Andhra Pradesh, multi-grade centres for the tribal and coastal areas of Kerala, contract schools in Maharashtra operating in a few tribal districts, single-teacher multi-grade schools in remote habitations in parts of Uttar Pradesh and EGS in Madhya Pradesh.
- **Long- and short-duration camps and bridge courses** to bring out-of-school children back to formal schools after attaining their appropriate learning levels. Strategies such as summer schools in Andhra Pradesh for the 6–8 age-group children who are out of school and the ‘back to school’ drive in Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh fall into this category. Also, there are long-duration residential camps for older working children being tried in several districts of Andhra Pradesh. These are organised along the lines of the model initiated by the M.V. Foundation model in Andhra Pradesh’s Ranga Reddy district.

- **Bridge courses during vacation offering remedial lessons** to children left behind due to irregular attendance and seasonal migration of families—In Gujarat, a teacher from the formal school runs short-duration, condensed courses to cater to children who migrate with their parents to sugarcane factories. On their return, they are mainstreamed into the formal school, thus preventing disruption of their studies.
- **Schools for children of migrant labourers in sugarcane fields and salt farms**—Gujarat and Maharashtra have tried to encourage employers of migrating families to provide minimum facilities at the worksite so that children continue to study. One teacher from the nearest formal school is deputed to run the school.
- **Schools with specially designed curriculum for adolescent girls**—Angana Vidyalayas in Bihar and Prehar Pathshalas in Uttar Pradesh are two examples of reaching education to adolescent girls who are out of school mainly due to social, cultural and economic factors. The curriculum is designed to suit the needs of these girls and draws on the experience of the Mahila Samakhya programme.
- **Strategies for the education of urban deprived children**—Migration to urban areas often results in disruption of the children's education. The AS programme of DPEP in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and other states is addressing the problems of urban slums through special programmes to help these children bridge the gap before they can be enrolled back into the formal school.
- **Support to *maktabs* and *madrasas* to reach out to girls belonging to Muslim communities**—By providing supplementary training to the instructors in traditional madrasas and maktabs where religious instruction is provided, AS in Assam and Uttar Pradesh have been able to help girls from Muslim communities access basic education.
- **Seasonal hostels for children of families who migrate** during lean agricultural seasons so that they do not fall back in their studies. There have been small experiments in Gujarat to retain children in their villages by accommodating them in temporary hostels so that they can continue their studies while their parents migrate seasonally to urban centres in search of work.

While there is an array of strategies to address the diverse needs of different groups, with the exception of EGS in Madhya Pradesh and

Chhattisgarh and bridges courses in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, other innovations are still being tried on a modest scale.

DECENTRALISED MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Most of the AS programmes have a threefold structure—administrative, academic resource support and consultative. The management system is based on the understanding of the linkages between these three. At every level there is an effort to build inter-sectoral linkages with other agencies and government departments, especially the departments of labour, women and child development, and social welfare. In some states the programmes have also forged working relationships with DIET and State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT). Some of the states have been tardy about setting up appropriate review mechanisms though consultative groups have been constituted (DPEP 2000b). One of the positive aspects of the programmes is that in many of the states there is no separate supervisory structure for the AS programme, and the BRC and CRC coordinators are responsible for the academic and administrative supervision supported by the AS coordinators in the district. This ensures continuous links with the mainstream, and in many areas (especially in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh) the mainstream has learnt a great deal from the alternative.

EMPHASIS ON QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Among the strategies adopted to ensure quality is the care taken towards the basic qualification of the teachers, their training (duration and content) and honorarium and academic support. Ensuring a minimum duration of school hours and making sure AS function for a minimum number of days in the year is another area of focus. Unlike the erstwhile NFE scheme, the timings of EGS and AS are comparable to formal schools. Similarly, there is also little difference in textbooks and TLM.

In addition to the above inputs to ensure education of comparable quality, it is now widely accepted that the question of quality is also linked to appropriate pedagogy for these children who are first-generation learners and come from disadvantaged social settings. The AS teachers are expected to facilitate the learning process by creating a better classroom environment, engaging in activity-based and child-centred learning and

allowing children to learn at their own pace. Textbooks have to be relevant to the lives of these children and should not be the only material for learning. Other TLM, developed locally, are necessary to create a rich and enjoyable learning environment for the children (DPEP 2000a, 2000b).

Several NGOs like Digantar, Bodh Shiksha Samiti, Rishi Valley Education Society, M.V. Foundation and others have contributed in designing appropriate materials for the AS programme as well as training programmes for the teachers. Exposure visits by DPEP-AS coordinators to NGO projects have also helped in creating an alternative mindset. However, change has been slow. Often, formal school textbooks are used, especially in unserved habitations, on the plea of equivalence or requirement of children to be mainstreamed. Or else, the alternative pedagogy is used on such a small, experimental scale that it is difficult to assess its effectiveness. Karnataka and Kerala have done interesting work in multi-grade and multi-level teaching, but it has not been sufficiently shared or adopted. On the basis of a review of its textbooks and materials, Madhya Pradesh has developed an integrated curriculum and materials that have now been introduced in the state.

The training of the teachers is inadequate, with some states providing only one week's foundation training with subsequent academic support through fortnightly/monthly meetings (DPEP 1999e, 1999f). Considering the fact that many AS teachers are less qualified than formal school teachers (a significant proportion of teachers have the same qualifications as formal school teachers) and they have the more arduous task of dealing with first-generation learners who are culturally and socially alienated from the 'mainstream', there is a growing acceptance that this training is woefully inadequate. What is however interesting is that, despite less training and in some cases less qualifications, the performance of children from such schools has not been markedly different from the results received from the formal primary schools. This could be because of the lower Student-Teacher Ratio (STR), regularity of classes and attendance of children as well as enthusiasm of children, teachers and the community. Given that most of them (especially EGS and bridge courses) are priority programmes of the concerned state governments, they tend to draw greater attention and thereby function at optimal capacity. As noted in Chapter 9 on Chhattisgarh, the EGS schools function regularly while the problem of dysfunctional primary schools continues.

COST-EFFECTIVENESS AS OPPOSED TO LOW-COST

The AS programme of DPEP has been fairly conscious of the fact that adequate investments have to be made in basic physical infrastructure, teacher training and honorarium, good-quality textbooks and TLM (Ed. CIL 1999). Besides this, only continuous academic support, and sufficient school hours and duration for the programme can provide good-quality primary education to these disadvantaged out-of-school children. This would achieve results comparable to that of formal schools, which are also in the process of quality improvement through pedagogic renewal under DPEP. The earlier NFE programmes suffered because they were structured as a low-cost alternative with inadequate investments in physical infrastructure, teacher training, honorariums, together with shorter school hours and a limited duration of the programme. Drawing upon the experience of NFE programmes run by NGOs, the AS programme under DPEP has attempted to address many quality and equivalence issues.

Costs are still much lower than the formal schools and at present, teachers are also paid lower salaries. Physical infrastructure continues to be inadequate for any meaningful interaction on teaching/learning to occur. Academic support is provided to teachers in some measure but there is growing realisation of the need to provide for upgradation of their academic qualifications and career advancement. Some states (West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh for example) have taken steps to induct parateachers into the regular programme (DPEP 2001a). Their appointments remain contractual to be renewed every year and what is interesting in West Bengal is that women over the age of 40 (the age threshold for formal government employment) are recruited to teach in Shishu Shiksha Kendras. Apparently this is done to make sure such teachers do not go to the court to demand regularisation as government servants. In most of the states, parateachers are seen as contract appointees of the panchayat or the village education committee.

There is growing evidence on the inadequacy of TLM. The 12th and 14th JRMs noted that there are opportunities for children to visit fairs, go on excursions and have a resource library of materials (books, toys, games, charts and models/kits) in the AS and at the cluster level could greatly enhance learning and also improve the overall quality. Similarly, school improvement grants to schools in unserved habitations would encourage the community to regard them as a more permanent facility for their children and enhance their involvement and participation.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

It is argued that one of the most important reasons for children either dropping out early or remaining out-of-school children is the lack of a convenient schooling facility in their own neighbourhood. To redress this situation the AS programme correctly envisaged a greater role for the community in the establishment and running of the school. This also implies that communities contribute towards a reasonable space for the school and identify a suitable teacher and this commitment ensures that children attend school regularly. Partnership with the community is said to be the bulwark of the AS programme. The involvement of the community in the management of the school has been sought through the formation of VECs, PTAs and MTAs. Specific tasks have been assigned to these bodies so that there is close interaction between the families, the community and the teacher.

However, given that the village community is stratified, the deprived sections whose children are the main expected beneficiaries of the AS programme are often not adequately represented in VLCs. The issue of participation of the poor and the more vulnerable has been discussed in all the six micro studies (see Chapters 8 to 13). In most areas community involvement reduces itself to just providing a space and identifying the teacher. In more homogeneous settings like remote or small tribal hamlets, these problems are less pronounced. Similarly, where the panchayati raj institutions are vibrant and dynamic, as in some states, the participation and involvement of the community is greater. However, in most cases, community participation is limited. There is almost unanimous agreement in the government that much more is required to be done, both in terms of decentralising the management of the schools as well as their role in determining or contributing to the academic content of the curriculum so that it becomes locally relevant to the lives of the children and their community.

The micro studies conducted in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh during the course of preparation of this report brings these issues into sharp focus (see Chapters 8 and 9). In Surguja district of Chhattisgarh, the primary school is in disrepair and few tribal children attend the school. On the other hand, the EGS centre demanded by the Other Backward Classes (OBC) community in the village is doing well. In the village in Betul district of Madhya Pradesh, where another micro study was conducted, there are separate boys' and girls' primary schools as well as an

EGS centre, and they are all running well, with clear segregation by socio-economic status and residence. In Tamil Nadu the VLC is not concerned with the school for dalit (socially disadvantaged groups, listed in the IXth Schedule of the Constitution of India, mostly belonging to the erstwhile community of 'untouchables') children. It is the parents and the women members of the self-help groups who take a more serious interest in the functioning of the school. This is also true of Andhra Pradesh. It is evident that having a VEC does not ensure decentralised management or community involvement.

EDUCATION GUARANTEE SCHEME

The sheer size and spread of the EGS centres in Madhya Pradesh deserves special mention as an important new initiative in the 1990s. The remarkable success of EGS has drawn the attention of planners and policy-makers. The revised NFE scheme of the Government of India is entitled EGS & AIE Scheme and incorporates much of the features of EGS as a possible way of addressing the needs of schoolless habitations. In simple terms, the EGS in Madhya Pradesh emerged after the Lok Sampark Abhiyan (LSA) carried out household surveys all across the state in 1996. These surveys indicated that a very large number of habitations were without schools and functioning NFE centres (see Appendix Table 2.10).

The state government responded by developing the EGS (RGSM 1999). Under this scheme, any community (gram panchayat) without a school within a kilometre radius having a minimum of 40 children (25 for tribal areas) in the 6–11 age-group who did not attend school would be sanctioned an EGS centre within 90 days of submitting a demand. The provision was that the local community identify a local person who could be the EGS teacher (Guruji) and also provide space where the EGS centre could function. The state government would provide for the honorarium and training of the Guruji, textbooks for the children and minimum contingencies. The scheme started in 1997 and according to latest reports, there are 22,661 EGS centres in Madhya Pradesh and 5,685 EGS centres in Chhattisgarh.

The key factors on which EGS hinges are community demand and government guarantee. By projecting community demand as a start-up point, EGS addresses the issues of enrolment and retention. The fact

that the Guruji is a local resident appointed by the gram panchayat ensures community control and reduces teacher absenteeism. The field reports of independent observers have recorded functioning EGS centres even where facilities are inadequate. The funding pattern and training of the Guruji are similar to the earlier AS programme in Madhya Pradesh and other states. However, the innovative textbooks of the AS programme are now being replaced by Integrated Learning Material (ILM), which are common to EGS and formal schools. Training of the EGS Guruji remains inadequate though a recent study concluded that the performance of children from EGS/AS was no worse than the performance of children in formal schools (DPEP 1999e). The study, however, also cautioned that the problem of inadequate training is likely to intensify as the EGS centres get upgraded to class five. This is a generic issue that is not confined to the EGS alone.

The EGS is seen as a successful mode of reaching the unreached or 'hard to reach'. In Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, it is now being stabilised as regular primary schools in the previously unserved habitations. A second teacher (usually female) is being recruited and the EGS centres are being upgraded to class five all across Madhya Pradesh. The success of EGS in Madhya Pradesh has a lot to do with the commitment of the political leadership and the determination and drive of the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission (RGSM).

The bifurcation of Chhattisgarh from Madhya Pradesh has proved disadvantageous to Chhattisgarh, even though many of the districts were part of DPEP-I where full-fledged district-level programme structures were created in 1994. It was disappointing to note that in a predominantly tribal area, the primary school accessible to tribals was not functioning while the EGS centre demanded by the economically stronger OBC community and the more 'forward' among the tribal groups was flourishing. Ironically, the more deprived tribal community was being further deprived and a scheme meant to be an 'equity' measure was benefiting the socially and economically better-off community. This is worrisome because the EGS centre should not become a substitute for the dysfunctional primary school. As this approach gets adopted in other states that have large numbers of schoolless habitations like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Orissa, the anomalies observed in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh may multiply manifold.

CURRENT STATUS OF AS AND EGS IN DPEP-I STATES (INCLUDING ANDHRA PRADESH)

Because of the diversity of circumstances in which the out-of-school children are placed, it is not surprising that the strategies adopted by the different states vary widely. Some states have a fairly extensive primary school network, which provides entry to most children within a distance of 1 kilometre. The problem in these states is to access the remaining 'hard-to-reach' children and address the needs of those who do not attend school even when there is one in the neighbourhood. Some states, notably Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (along with Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Orissa), have a large number of small habitations that do not qualify for a formal school. The strategies here are different. A review of the status of the programme in the DPEP-I states (including Andhra Pradesh) where the DPEP programme has been operational for seven years gives an indication of the variations from state to state and highlights the problems and issues in the AS programme. Table 5.1 draws attention to the quantitative aspects of the AS programme in the different states.

It is evident from Table 5.1 that the bulk of AS/EGS centres and bridge courses/summer schools are in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The political leadership of these states has shown their commitment to the issue of primary education by providing access to the 'unreached' and drawing children away from work and into school.

OVERVIEW OF THE STATUS OF AS AND EGS IN DPEP-I AND ANDHRA PRADESH

This data is based on documents of the 13th Joint Review Mission (DPEP 2001a).

COVERAGE

The numbers of schools vary greatly among the states partly because of the extent of schoolless habitations as well as expansion of the programme. Madhya Pradesh clearly leads the way with 22,661 EGS schools (AS merged with EGS) covering 1,028,190 children. Chhattisgarh follows with 5,485 centres covering 125,103 children. Kerala has very specific problems in coastal and tribal areas and the number of multi-grade centres is only

TABLE 5.1
Alternative schools in DPEP state-wise progress overview—April 2001

State	Current status (Centres/Schools)	Children enrolled
Andhra Pradesh	2,360 AS centre/community schools 16,412 summer schools 1,184 mabadi schools 108 child-labour programme centres Eight residential camps for migrants/ working children	76,698 AS/community schools 450,000 summer schools 14,408 mabadi 3,700 in child-labour cen- tres 4,000 in residential camps and 58 in camps for urban children
Assam	695 NFE centres 111 interventions in makhtabs 2,332 AS centres	23,795 4,877 100,950
Bihar	1,229 <i>apna vidyalaya</i> 1,022 <i>angan vidyalaya</i>	Total approx. 57,804
Chhattisgarh	5,485 all AS merged with EGS	125,103
Gujarat	1,973 back-to-school camps and range of bridge courses	43,712 in back-to-school camps and 2,347 in bridge course
Haryana	1,580 centres	35,750
Himachal Pradesh	378 proposal in perspective plans 125 approved by EC 74 notified by state government yet to be operationalised	25 centres activated by the state in three districts w.e.f. 2000–01
Jharkhand	820 Apna Vidyalaya 373 Angan Vidyalaya	23,024 in Apna Vidyalaya 8,016 in Angan Vidyalaya
Karnataka	518 NFE centres and 77 bridge courses	13,734 in NFE and 2,130 in bridge courses
Kerala	300 multi-grade centres	6,358
Madhya Pradesh	22,661 all AS have been merged with EGS	1,028,190 in AS and EGS
Maharashtra	1,541 (Prerna) NFE centres 299 contract schools Eight sugar schools Five group residential schools	39,895 5,338 845 (seasonal Nov–Apr) 200
Orissa	435 AS centres opened in unserved habitations	10,992
Tamil Nadu	1,148 AS	23,078

(Table 5.1 contd)

(Table 5.1 contd)

State	Current status (Centres/Schools)	Children enrolled
Uttar Pradesh	828 Shikshagharii, 163 Balshala, 89 Prehar Pathshala, 129 makhtabs/mad-rasas, 76 Rishi Valley Model and 2,148 EGS	67,055 total 31,577 (boys) 35,478 (girls)
Uttaranchal	53 Shiksha Ghar 245 EGS (219 EGS and 17 AS centres are in operation)	6,490 total
West Bengal	4,511 Child Education Centres (SSK)	176,095 total

Source: Documents of the 13th Joint Review Mission (April 2001).

300 covering 6,358 children in tribal pockets and coastal areas. Most of the other states range between 1,100 and 3,600 centres covering between 23,078 children (Tamil Nadu) and 129,622 (Assam).

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

All the states have constituted the SRG and DRG for the AS programme and most of them have also appointed the AS coordinators at state and district levels.

CAPACITY BUILDING

All the states have completed their visioning and AS strategy-planning workshop. SRG and DRG members have had an orientation meeting/workshop and in some states these meetings are being held regularly. Similarly, SRG and DRG members have had exposure visits to NGO projects like Digantar, Rishi Valley, M.V. Foundation, etc.

EQUIVALENCE STRATEGY

Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have a major focus on children in schoolless habitations that are significant in number. These two states also give special emphasis to tribal children, particularly girls. Most of the other states focus mainly on dropouts (working) children and never-enrolled children who may be potential child labourers (Andhra Pradesh). Children of migratory labour are another target group in some of the

states. Assam makes a special effort with AS to reduce the PTR load in formal schools and also reach out to girls from minority groups.

DURATION

States running AS/EGS in schoolless habitations have a programme for four to five years, except Haryana and Maharashtra that have followed the older NFE pattern of two years, which is now being revised. However, many states like Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra have a short-duration programme of 60–75 days offering bridge courses to bring children back to school and help those with irregular attendance due to migratory families.

SCHOOL HOURS

Most states have full-time school hours or at least four hours except Assam and Tamil Nadu, which still have shorter hours (two to three hours) per day.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER CLASS

The number of children varies from 25–40, though in some cases the number could be as high as 50 (Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh) and as low as 10–20 (Maharashtra and Haryana). In Andhra Pradesh, 200 children at a time attend residential camps.

TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS, TRAINING AND HONORARIUM

Most states recruit teachers, who are qualified matriculates or the equivalent, except in very exceptional cases where it may be relaxed. Kerala pays its multi-grade centre teachers an honorarium of Rs 2,000 per month, which is an exception. Otherwise all states pay between Rs 500–1,000. The initial training can be as low as three days (Andhra Pradesh) or vary between 7–10 days. Kerala has a comprehensive training programme. Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Assam provide 21 days' initial training to AS teachers. All states provide periodic refresher training.

EXPENDITURE PER SCHOOL PER YEAR

The annual cost per school is low in Maharashtra (Rs 4,000–10,000) and Tamil Nadu (Rs 7,530). Andhra Pradesh has varying costs ranging from Rs 9,000–15,000. Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh costs are Rs 14,860 for single-teacher AS and Rs 30,200 for two-teacher schools. In other states it varies between Rs 20,000–25,000.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND SUPERVISION

The existing DIET, BRC and CRC provide academic support. In Andhra Pradesh it is the Mandal Education Officer (MEO) and Mandal Resource Persons (MRP) who provide support. Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and Assam have separate supervisors for every eight to 10 schools. Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have AS/EGS in charge in DIETs.

TEACHING-LEARNING MATERIALS

Some states use existing formal school textbooks (Haryana and Tamil Nadu) or modified texts (Assam). Others have developed separate textbooks (Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh) with the help of NGOs or adopted self-learning materials (kits) developed by NGOs (Maharashtra, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh) or developed their own (Karnataka). Most recently, Madhya Pradesh has decided to have one integrated textbook (merging the different models) for EGS and formal schools, thereby putting an end to duality in teaching and learning materials.

COLLABORATION WITH NGOS

All the states have active collaboration with NGOs experienced in this area of work.

A common pattern is emerging despite variations among states—even though a few states are yet to totally break away from the old pattern of NFE. Some states have supported very interesting work with children of migratory families or working children and street children. The deprived urban children are increasingly becoming an important target group in DPEP planning for AS.

The two positive aspects of the AS programme are close linkages with NGOs (Andhra Pradesh) and the involvement of the community (Madhya Pradesh). Costs here are still much lower than in the formal school programme because of the limited infrastructure and the lower honorarium paid to the teachers, though some states do make a provision for improvement of the facilities in the AS. Community contribution is also not always taken into account.

The richness and variety of experiences in DPEP states manifest the need for a more comprehensive approach towards the problem of out-of-school children. The need is for educational planning for habitations to be based on exact numbers arrived at through household surveys. The Madhya Pradesh experience of conducting the LSA in 1996 and repeating it in 2000 in all the DPEP districts threw up data on actual numbers of children who were never enrolled and listed small habitations with no access to a formal school within 1 kilometre. This enabled the planning of EGS and consequently, within a short period, most of these habitations were provided with an EGS centre. Learning from this experience all DPEP states have or are presently conducting surveys to ascertain the total number of children who are not in school rather than relying on the school enrolment data for planning and management.

While the EGS pattern has emerged with a clear direction to ensure access to children in schoolless habitations, it is yet to establish itself as an equivalent alternative to the formal school (RGSM 1999). The consensus appears to be that EGS should, in course of time, be upgraded to offer five years of schooling and not limit itself to two years. Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have already upgraded all their EGS to five years and have appointed a second teacher or teacher assistant (usually a woman from the local community). Investments in improving the physical infrastructure of the EGS will be necessary and gradually these will become primary schools, perhaps with a local flavour and relevance!

The other trend that is emerging is the 'back to school' campaign spearheaded by the summer schools in Andhra Pradesh which reach out to a very large number of children all across the state. Karnataka has picked up this trend and so have some of the other states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar. Clearly, the idea is to utilise existing facilities as much as possible. If children are not attending school even when there is a facility nearby, then the goal is to provide remedial classes or special drives to help them reach their appropriate levels to be re-admitted into the formal system. The support through bridge courses of varying duration (between 60-75 days) helps these children and the effort

is to continue to assist the children even after enrolment in the formal school. This is particularly relevant for girls and children from SC/ST and minority communities who face a range of social and cultural disabilities.

If the main body of out-of-school children is covered by these two major initiatives, especially if planning for them is based on reliable household-survey data, there will still remain a fair number of children in difficult circumstances who require special treatment. There have been successful experiences in reaching out to street children or working children in urban settings and addressing the needs of older girls through long-duration residential camps. From the point of view of equity, which is a central concern of DPEP, these initiatives require additional support and extension. Similarly, the problem of children from migratory families has not been successfully addressed in DPEP. This is a difficult issue, since an educational initiative cannot control the movement of families who are migratory owing to compelling economic circumstances. In this context, some systematic effort—and there are examples in DPEP—is therefore required in the AS programme of DPEP (Ed.CIL 1999).

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLING AND ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

The experience of AS in DPEP and the present thrust towards EGS and bridge courses to reach the out-of-school children through easier access (as in EGS) or help them return to the formal school (through bridge courses) indicates that the pressure is towards ‘mainstreaming’ or a single pattern of education. Even the Madhya Pradesh EGS scheme has now adopted the uniform curriculum of the formal schools and the ILM common to all schools. This is justified on the basis of the political compulsion of providing the same education for all children without any discrimination. While there is persuasive logic in this argument, it fails to take into account the difficulties encountered by the ‘hard-to-reach’ children in view of their economic, social and cultural circumstances.

In the absence of any effective Early Childhood Education (ECE) the children from SC/ST and poor families begin school with a handicap. The informality of the EGS centre (or other AS experiments) and self-paced learning through activities helps them adjust to the idea of a school as a learning environment. If the same informality were to continue till class V, children would be better able to adapt themselves to the pressures of the formal system—examinations, information load of textbooks,

etc. It would give them a reasonable chance to catch up with others in the 'mainstream'. In any case, the training of AS teachers, particularly the EGS Gurujis, is inadequate for them to shepherd children who are first-generation learners through the demanding grade-wise syllabus of the formal schools. AS/EGS centres should be allowed the flexibility to pursue a curriculum that is locally relevant and easier for children to understand combined with self-paced learning, using the experience gathered in the course of the various innovative AS projects in DPEP and elsewhere in the country.

The approach of an alternative education model for disadvantaged children as opposed to 'mainstreaming' them into the formal schools requires serious consideration. In pursuit of a uniform educational pattern, what is forgotten is that a single curriculum together with uniform textbooks and an examination system tends to exclude children who begin school with a basic disadvantage. The classroom process is discriminatory; the texts are beyond easy comprehension and the pressure of examinations starts early in life for all school children (see Chapter 6).

If UEE is about universalisation of elementary education, then all children have to be brought to the same level of achievement at the end of eight years of schooling. However, the route followed by different children may vary and that flexibility is very necessary for children who are 'hard to reach'. The answer does not lie in a 'no detention' policy as practised widely in several states. It has to be found in devising imaginative curricula, better training of teachers, innovative teaching materials and activities and self-paced learner evaluation. Within the AS programme of DPEP there is sufficient experience to take these efforts further.

SUSTAINABILITY BEYOND DPEP—EGS AND AIE SCHEMES

The initiative for AS in DPEP has been constrained by uncertainty about its continued funding through external assistance after the end of the project period; however states like Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh have declared their intention to pursue the goal of UEE regardless of availability of external funds (GOI 2001a). This is not the case in other states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan. The long-term implication that arises is the effect this would have on the status and career prospects of the AS/EGS teachers. AS provides enormous opportunities for experimentation and innovation—this, most observers agree, has not been explored fully. The downside is that in many instances, AS appears to

have remained a stopgap arrangement till the younger children (6–8 years) are old enough to walk the additional distance to the formal school.

The new centrally sponsored scheme of EGS and AIE has been designed after reviewing the earlier NFE scheme and learning from the experience gained from the implementation of various AS strategies under DPEP combined with the innovations by several other projects like Lok Jumbish. The new scheme has provisions for a range of options like EGS, back-to-school camps, Balika Shivirs, etc. There are four broad focus areas:

- Full-time community schools for small unserved habitations.
- Mainstreaming of children who are out of school through bridge courses.
- Specific strategies for special groups like child labour, street children, adolescent girls, children belonging to migrating families, etc.
- Innovative programmes in the area of pedagogic practices, curriculum, TLM, etc.

Broad parameters have been laid down within which states have the freedom to design strategies suitable to their particular needs. There has also been a substantial increase in the financial provisions. This scheme assumes importance in the context of the revised targets that have been set to achieve UPE by 2007 and UEE by 2010 under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). So far, the provision of universal access has been more or less addressed. The more difficult questions of retention and completion of five to eight years of schooling (formal or EGS and AIE) and achieving measurable competencies require urgent attention.

CONCLUSION

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the literacy rate according to the Census 2001 has shown a significant rise since 1991 (see Appendix Table 2.1). Several low female literacy districts (a criterion for selection of DPEP districts) have shown dramatic leaps in female literacy. For example, Chitrakoot district in Uttar Pradesh (one of the UPBEP and Mahila Samakhya districts) registered a fourfold increase from 13 per cent female literacy in 1991 to 52 per cent in 2001. This is not an isolated example and it shows that initiatives to reach primary education to the 'hard to reach' and adult literacy efforts in the last decade have yielded positive results. However, the challenge of meeting UEE goals by 2010 is a much more daunting task.

The experience of the last decade clearly indicates that there is a great demand for primary education for all children. The poor, deprived and marginalised families in particular are willing to bear considerable hardship to afford an education of reasonable quality for their children. However, there is no assurance that the state provision of educational facilities measures up to their modest expectations or that children belonging to SC/ST communities, and girls in particular, are treated equally in the primary school (see Chapters 6 and 8-13).

The AS (including EGS) programme of DPEP has made a significant effort to reach children in former unserved habitations and enrolments in AS have grown rapidly countrywide; the AS programme of DPEP now caters to over two million children. However, the quality of these schools and their performance in terms of learning achievements require considerable improvement. Diversity and flexibility often becomes a convenient excuse to become inattentive to quality while meeting targets of universalising access. The main purpose should be to provide meaningful primary education relevant to marginalised and deprived children appropriate to their daily life. Much work remains to be done in pedagogy, materials, teacher training and learning assessment.

However, the administrative mechanism has not always been able to use the dynamic and innovative elements of the model AS programme. The role of the community remains limited (with considerable regional variation), NGOs (with the exception of Andhra Pradesh) have been used for limited inputs and there has been little concern for the AS teacher's professional development and career growth. These are matters that require immediate attention if the programme is not to degenerate into a second-rate primary education programme of the government. This is of particular importance in SSA because there is a temptation to restrict expansion of primary schooling to AS and EGS, especially when the fiscal situation of most state governments remains fragile. Similarly, it has been reported in the press and also during DPEP JRMs that some states have unofficially decided not to recruit any more primary school teachers and that they plan to opt for parateachers. Expanding the pool of parateachers could ultimately lead to conflict within the cadre itself.

Finally, much larger investments are necessary if the UPE/UEE targets are to be met, not just to expand the programme but also to improve its quality and enrich the educational process. The point is not just to pay lip service to UEE but also to respond to the learning needs of deprived children so that the historical disadvantage that they are burdened with is corrected early in their lives. In a rapidly changing socio-economic

environment, goal setting in terms of quality and competencies to be achieved has to be much higher than ever before. In this context, the spread of private initiatives in primary education even in rural areas should not be ignored (see Chapter 10). It should be seen as a challenge to be overcome by better performance in the formal system. India as a nation cannot afford to ignore the need of first-generation learners across the country. What we need is more investment in the education of marginalised groups and not less investments and low-cost alternatives. While AS and EGS have expanded access in DPEP, the challenge before the government is to ensure long-term planning and resource commitment that is essential to sustain the level of participation and ensure good-quality education for all children.

6 INSIDE THE CLASSROOM:

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF CLASSROOM PROCESSES STUDIES IN EIGHT STATES

Vandana Madan

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was initiated in 1994 in several states in India with the aim of creating a socially sensitive and pupil- and teacher-friendly curriculum that would generally improve enrolment, access, retention and the quality of education at the district level. In addition, the programme was to lay special emphasis on reaching and retaining girls and socially disadvantaged and backward groups (SCs and STs). The programme covered various states such as Assam, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Bihar in its two phases.

Under DPEP, several training programmes for teachers were organised at the state level. These included in-service training, workshops for developing teaching aids, orientation courses on gender sensitisation, class planning, pupil assessment systems and textbook revision. Besides the focus on teachers and teaching, extensive administrative involvement was initiated as an essential prerequisite to the success of DPEP. This implied a certain local participation, achieved through the setting up of BRCs and CRCs, along with the VEC. These were expected to actively participate in programme implementation and also form an evaluative and monitoring body. The DPEP also aimed to constantly re-evaluate its functioning and make improvements based on continued feedback from the districts through certain self-assessment mechanisms for programme evaluation, monitoring of schools, teachers and the administration as well as the extent of community participation at the block and cluster levels.

Though a large part of the reports on the progress of DPEP is based on quantitative data, a small proportion of the feedback is qualitative and in the nature of Classroom Process Studies (CPS). These documents are prepared by government resource persons based on field studies in different districts and states.

The extent of the success or failure of DPEP can be gauged by looking at the classroom activities in local, district schools that form the content of these reports. The present analysis is based on 14 such reports from 14 districts in eight states. Though not exhaustive in the contexts and areas covered, these reports nevertheless have general implications as far as the successful implementation of DPEP is concerned. Both state-specific examples and those representative of the states in general have been used, since both need to be considered for an effective understanding of the new education strategies implemented since 1994.

The states and districts covered for analysis are as follows:

1. Uttar Pradesh: Lalitpur district
2. Karnataka: Mandya, Kolar and Mysore districts
3. Madhya Pradesh: Shahdol district
4. Kerala: Palakkad and Mallapuram districts
5. Tamil Nadu: Dharmapuri and Thiruvannamalai districts
6. Maharashtra: Latur and Nanded districts
7. Andhra Pradesh: Chittoor and Kurnool districts
8. Haryana: Hisar district

‘THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS’: CLASSROOM PROCESSES

As stated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development report titled ‘Inside the Classroom: A Synthesis of Classroom Processes (2001)’, the main objectives for studying classroom processes are:

- To identify, document and disseminate positive practices adopted by the schools.
- To understand emerging trends of change in pedagogic practices, i.e., motivation skills, etc.
- To understand how the DPEP vision at the state level translates at the district, block and cluster levels.
- To identify enabling conditions for well-functioning schools.

It needs to be noted here that issues of gender and other social discrimination that DPEP hoped to address in its initial objectives, and the impact of DPEP on the disadvantages that can ensue from an individual's identity, do not directly fall within the scope of these classroom processes' studies. At the outset it is noteworthy that the CPS under review do not take into account, as a part of its methodology or concern, the important issues of gender and equity.

This cannot be taken lightly as it overlooks one of the main aims of DPEP, i.e., addressing the concerns of the socially disadvantaged and backward communities. However, a perusal of the reports makes it clear that they contain an underlying fine print that needs to be acknowledged. Every one of the reports throws up questions on the issues of gender and equity as well as highlights prevailing discriminatory practices.

That this is a serious issue can be gauged from the fact that a large proportion of the expected beneficiaries of the new programme were meant to be girls and the SC/ST communities—people who, in a country like India, can clearly be considered as being 'doubly disadvantaged'. Doubly because, in the former case they are 'female' and live in a deeply patriarchal and tradition-bound social structure where they have no 'voice', and if, perchance, they belong to a socially backward community, they become even more inconsequential. In the latter case, to be a tribal or dalit is to be marginalised thrice over—socially, politically and economically. These communities do not figure in the overall social design by virtue of being 'culturally' and 'socially' different. It is this intolerance of 'difference' that also underlies the failure of CPS to address the important issue of disability and special-needs education.

There is another reason why the issues of equity, sensitivity and special concern are of utmost importance. The groups being addressed by DPEP are often not only socially handicapped but also include a large number of first-generation learners. While it is true that in some states like Kerala and Karnataka, there are a number of second- and third-generation learners, this is not the case in all states. There is enough documentation to suggest the need for greater sensitivity and care in the dissemination of teaching and learning if children and communities to which first-generation learners belong are to be convinced not just of the advantages of a basic education but particularly of the kind offered by DPEP. Unless the system can convince communities that their children are better off going to school than working in the field, and are more fruitfully occupied by the new way of joyful learning which actually teaches rather than indulges them in 'khelna-koodna' (playing and jumping) or 'nachna-gana'

(dancing and singing), the basic aim of the DPEP will remain unfulfilled (parental responses in Mandya district report [Rao 2000: 79], Palakkad district report [Bhat 2000: 48], and Lalitpur district report [Arora 2000: 13]).

In other words, unless 'first-generation parents' believe that in the long run the new system is better than the old one, the programme cannot succeed. On the basis of what emerges from an analysis of the CPS, one can safely say that though the horse has been successfully led to the water, it has not yet been made to drink.

TEACHERS AND PUPILS

Apart from the issue of convincing parents and the larger community that the DPEP way of learning is more beneficial and offers them opportunities that the old system does not, there is another constituency that warrants consideration—the teaching community itself.

Although DPEP conducts teacher-training programmes, workshops for developing aids/class planning/textbook revision, as well as gender sensitisation workshops, it is obvious that the root of the problem remains untouched. A three- or even 10-day training programme that seeks to teach a new tribal language and other such crash programmes, cannot erase the impact that years of traditional cultural socialisation have had on an individual's mind (Nanded district report [Paranjape 2000: 73]). The teacher's cultural background and traditional upbringing and mindset often play foul with the intent of the education they are expected to impart. The social and cultural attitudes that teachers bring into the classroom often lead to biased attitudes among children and perpetuate prevailing social inequalities. This is clearly reflected in the CPS. The bias may be unintentional, but it is important to remember that a teacher serves as a role model for students; the latter pick up the biases that the teacher, however unconsciously, communicates to the class, thus strengthening the incipient social differences between social groups and individuals.

Besides, a large percentage of teachers, particularly those who have been teaching for a while, have been trained to impart the traditional rote- and memory-based learning. Being part of DPEP means that they are required to undo what has been second nature to them for years, and adopt a system that many see as mere 'singing and dancing'. This does not fit their self or social image.

The CPS clearly show how within the teaching community itself, the response to pedagogic renewal initiatives of DPEP are uneven. This is reflected in the general lack of openness to the new pedagogy, which affects enrolment and retention, the distinction made between younger and older teachers in terms of curriculum and timetables and male and female teachers in terms of classes taught and schools taught in. This discrimination is notwithstanding the finding that where the teachers are young women, a higher degree of interest is noted within the classroom. In Kolar district, Karnataka, for instance, a high magnitude of association is found between teacher gender and the dalit/tribal and female test score (Kolar district report [Clarke 2000: 47]).

The older, and especially the male, teachers are really the ones most unhappy with this new method, as compared to the younger teachers who are more enthusiastic and innovative. Many resent the fact that under DPEP, they are expected to create Teaching-learning Materials (TLM), do extra paper work as well as take on additional duties such as supervising the midday meal. The teachers view this as an additional burden they are reluctant to take on. They thus often compromise their teaching episodes with the excuse that they are busy with administrative work. The midday meal scheme, though helpful to students, is particularly a sore point with teachers who regard it as an imposition on their time. It is reported, for instance, that the teachers in Lalitpur district see these extra duties as a 'burden' that adversely affects their performance (Lalitpur district report [Arora 2000: 14]).

In other words, if teachers, who as role models are expected to influence and mould young minds, are themselves unhappy with the system, then it is unreasonable to expect that they will do justice to it. This aspect is compounded by the personal biases teachers consciously or unconsciously employ in the teaching process. The derogatory language used; the attention given or not given to a specific group of children; the constant promotion of some children in class while ignoring others; the assumption that because they are from a particular social group they are incapable of learning and other similar gender-based discrimination—all prevent the real intent of DPEP from being realised.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TLM

A classroom is a forum for interaction between teachers and students. It is the place where ideas are developed, minds built and values perpetuated.

What a student absorbs depends not only on what is taught and how it is taught but also on how joyful the learning process is. This is greatly influenced by the nature of the environment or setting of the school. Of the 14 districts, most reported an absence of basic infrastructure amenities. Where they are available, they are largely unused. Most schools have few classrooms and too many students, resulting in multi-grade situations, both in academic and physical terms.

Toilets and drinking water facilities are lacking. Often, in some schools, the backyard is used as an open toilet. There are schools where students sit under trees in courtyards as the school buildings are in a state of disrepair. Within the classroom, there is often no storage facility for TLM and other aids, which are essential infrastructural materials for DPEP.

In the Nanded district, Maharashtra, of the 10 schools reported, five had no drinking water facilities, four no electricity, seven no usable toilets and in six, over 60 per cent of their TLM and other aids were stored away in boxes (Nanded district report [Paranjape 2000: 6]). A similar situation prevails in the Hisar district, Haryana, where even the blackboard—the most basic of classroom aids—has been created by painting a black square on the classroom wall (Hisar district report [Vishakha 2000: 17]).

In most districts, students do not have basic reading or writing material. This may be reflective of the earlier rote method where little independent activity was allowed in the classroom, and learning was based on repetition rather than reading and comprehension. Or it could simply be the result of a lack of initiative or mishandling of funds allocated for making basic infrastructure available to students. There are exceptions, of course. For instance, in Shahdol district, Madhya Pradesh, the construction of the school building shows a certain degree of innovation: instead of the usual rectangular bunker with cubby-holes for rooms, this school has been shaped as a large hexagon.

Overall, it appears that within most classrooms, teachers tend not to follow the teaching strategies recommended by DPEP. Instead of engaging students in constructive learning, teachers often give them assignments merely to keep them occupied. Also, they display no concern or interest in how the students handle the given assignments, or their progress in general. This is most vividly reflected in the tendency to seat several grades together irrespective of their comprehension levels (Lalitpur district

report [Arora 2000: 18]), and the fact that essential TLM, such as library books, are either never lent out or only used for display (see Chapters 9 and 12 in this book).

In the case of Kolar district, Karnataka, it is seen that group transaction is not always efficient, as children do not receive individual attention (Kolar district report [Clarke 2000]). The Kolar report also raises questions about the use of activities and the didactic character of class interaction, with students responding only when questioned. These have not transformed teaching and learning in the classroom as activity, demonstration and repetition continue to make the teacher the primary player (*ibid.*: 52–53). In addition, when teachers have to handle more than one grade, often within the same room, uneven teacher-student ratio makes dissemination of knowledge a difficult task and drastically reduces the degree of attention students receive.

Lack of planning in terms of teaching time, and with regard to the subject to be taught, is reported in all districts under review. Where the relationship between the teachers and students is informal and personalised, it is seen that students are able to learn more quickly and retain an interest in what they do. Changes in classroom presentation, where tables and chairs have been replaced by floor mats on which students and teachers sit together and work as a group, has helped to strengthen this rapport.

In Mallapuram district, Kerala, it was observed that reducing the significance of the textbook increases student participation; similarly, where the teacher is actively involved, there is greater response from students (Mallapuram district report [Agnihotri 2000: 13]). Though this is the case in most schools, the manner and content of teaching, as well as the teachers' qualifications (or lack thereof), often work as stumbling blocks in the learning process.

For instance, in Latur district, Maharashtra, it is frequently seen that the teachers are unfamiliar with the subject being taught since they lack the requisite education and/or training (Latur district report [Gupte 2000: 24]). Further, though fairly successful at the junior level, they find the curriculum at the senior level much harder to deal with and are unable to meet students' requirements. They need further training to enable better content understanding/transaction. This is because there are few teachers in primary schools who have studied up to class XII or the B. Ed level, and have adequate training (*ibid.*: 40).

This situation appears to be uniform across all schools in all 14 districts, though the worst hit are tribal schools, where a single teacher manages several grades and can thus spend little time with each student. Shortage of classrooms, lack of uniform teacher motivation, unshared pedagogic ideas combined with incompetence in dealing with senior class syllabi, as well as unattractive packaging of learning material, textbooks and other aids give rise to further problems. The fact that teachers and pupils often do not belong to the same community creates language as well as social barriers. Schools are often inaccessible and lack basic infrastructure. The kind of time given to curriculum development and fruitful learning is variable and, as stated earlier, the teachers' (lack of) interest affects the learning desire and capacity of the students.

Teachers' performance is also affected by the problems of distance and transport unavailability, with teachers often being up to 45 minutes late, as is the case in Lalitpur district, Uttar Pradesh. In some instances, the problem is further compounded by student absenteeism, either due to illness, distance from school or sheer lack of interest in curriculum activity. Often, as in Uttar Pradesh, students come in the initial stages to collect the state stipend and then remain absent for the rest of the year. In some cases it is observed that teachers are so concerned with attaining the MLL targets required of them that, as is reported for Thiruvannamalai district, Tamil Nadu, they are relatively unconcerned about student comprehension. The reports also show that what is expected of the teachers under the DPEP scheme is often unrealistic. As mentioned earlier, the in-service training teachers receive usually comprises two or three-day crash courses in learning a new language to communicate with the students, particularly in the tribal areas.

Thus the CPS throw up several successful patterns of interaction between students and teachers, particularly when the activity is child-centred, uses innovative teaching aids, involves the whole class, does not discriminate between the intelligent and slow learners and enables joyful learning. At the same time the data available reveals that there are barriers to sustained learning. These include: student absenteeism, lack of teachers' involvement, lack of or inadequate qualifications, the necessity to teach more than one class, assignment of multiple tasks—including administration, the requirement to oversee the midday meal and, in the case of some teachers, their evident disinterest in educating and guiding young learners who may carry with them ingrained social and mental disadvantages from the start.

'A ROOM WITHOUT A VIEW': TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PEDAGOGIC RENEWAL AND COMMUNITY RESPONSE

TEACHERS AND TEACHING METHODS

Even though teachers in all 14 districts have undergone the mandatory DPEP teachers' training programme and have tried to implement the recommended packages, there continues to be a lacuna, as shown in earlier sections, by the absence of child-centred activity, a lack of openness to DPEP and its innovative teaching methods. In many cases, this gap is reflected in the continued use of the traditional textbook as the main TLM and the prominence given to the rote and memorising methods. Little innovation of teaching aids or resources has taken place.

In Kolar district, Karnataka, for instance, the resource person found that the teachers' perception of MLL is at variance with DPEP's vision. Most translate MLL to mean maintaining a cordial relationship with students, making students feel better and avoiding partiality (Kolar district report [Clarke 2000: 9]). Often, they are totally apathetic to the students' familial situation and lack of a support system. Instead of trying to understand this problem, teachers tend to penalise the students in various ways. Thus, teachers affiliated with government-run schools in Nanded district, Maharashtra, do not interact or report back to parents of tribal children, as they assume that these parents would be unable to understand what 'results' means (Nanded district report [Paranjape 2000: 48]), let alone be interested in the schooling process.

There are, of course, some teachers who are innovative and actively involved in creating change along the new pedagogic pattern. And where such teachers are present, the nature of schooling is visibly different, as in the case of the Palakkad district, Kerala. In this district, the positive attitude of teachers towards their work is reflected in the fact that though most of them commute long distances to the villages, they are punctual (either because they have their own transport, or the roadways have improved, or that they have chosen to stay in the village during the week and go home only on weekends).

The teachers' interest is also reflected in the decision to create their own TLM as opposed to buying it from the market, like in the case of schools in Mallapuram district, Kerala. Teacher interest can be further gauged by the manner in which they interact with students, as in the case

of the EGS in Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh, or in Thiruvannamalai district, where the teacher is an institution in herself/himself.

Criticisms notwithstanding, the general impression conveyed by the district reports is that DPEP has brought with it a sea change in the teaching patterns and classroom situation, and the teachers have benefited from the various in-service training programmes that have introduced them to the advantages of TLM and more informal ways of teaching, such as song, dance, drama and other cultural activities. Teachers in Karnataka and Kerala districts speak of the advantage of training in tradition-based activities and packages such as the Nali Kali, DPEP's Chiguru and the handbooks prepared by NGOs which are context specific and carry greater familiarity.

The district of Dharmapuri in Tamil Nadu comes across as successful as far as DPEP is concerned. This could be attributed to the involvement of the local administration in the programme at all levels, teacher and management interest and a good teacher-pupil ratio. In addition, the Tamil Nadu government offers children incentives to attend school, such as free books, uniforms and meals. The Gross Access Ratio (GAR) of the district is 96 per cent, while the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for 1999–2000 was 91 per cent with an average completion rate of 50.66 per cent.

Examples such as these and the discussion in this section reveals that the self-perception of the teacher as an educator needs to be given deeper thought if DPEP strategies are to be successful. Often what is intended is not communicated. It is clear from the studies contained in this volume that it is not only enough for teachers to be aware of the MLL methods recommended by DPEP or by other programmes, but they also need to have the knowledge and ability to fruitfully use and translate them into meaningful class experience. They need to be more sensitive to the needs of students and the communities' expectations of the new system as well.

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY

The lack of communication and understanding is evident at the community level as well. Several parents complained that instead of focusing on textbook-based, traditional learning, their children are engaged in 'khel-kood'. Many feel that compared to the traditional method of learning by rote, whereby children would at least know their tables or the alphabet, and would be able to speak English at an early age, the indirect approach followed by DPEP is a 'waste of time' as children spend more time singing and dancing rather than on written work. Some parents even complain

about the lack of homework (Mandya [Rao 2000] and Lalitpur [Arora 2000] district reports).

Similarly, in Palakkad district, Kerala, parents who earlier insisted that children attend school regularly, now no longer view their child missing a day or two as a matter of serious concern since they regard the new learning to be merely 'fun and games' (Palakkad district report [Bhat 2000: 48]).

The parents' apathy is also reflected in the constant complaint by most teachers of the lack of parental and community support; the withdrawal of students at harvest time or during the monsoon; the failure of these children to be consistent in their schooling or the appearance in class of a girl student accompanied by a younger sibling whom she has to look after. None of these problems, however, have been given due attention, nor has any effort been made by the teachers to change the situation at the local level.

There are, of course, districts where parents, along with the VEC, are actively involved in village schooling, often offering financial help for the midday meal scheme and even substituting as teachers when necessary. They are proud of the achievements of the village school and supportive of both teachers and students. They are convinced about the advantages of the system either because they themselves are literate or have been made aware of the advantages, as in Karnataka and Kerala. In addition, as shown by the micro studies in Section II (see Chapters 8 to 13 in this volume), where the village or regional panchayats are active, DPEP has seen greater success. However, there are also states where communities still do not know what the acronym DPEP stands for (see Chapter 11).

It is clear from this mix of information provided in the reports that in order to succeed, DPEP would have to direct a great deal of effort towards generating awareness—not just at the level of teachers but also the community. Just as the teachers are provided with in-service training, it may help the programme if, before its implementation, the community is sensitised to how the new method works and what it aims to do. Awareness of alternative teaching methods would, in turn, engender openness to new ideas that might lead to the emergence of new schooling patterns. The participation of parents is essential to the success of DPEP, for it is they who decide whether their children do or do not attend school. Unconvinced parents would naturally prefer to see their children engaged in more visible and 'gainful' activity, such as paid labour or caring for younger siblings, rather than send them to a school where children seem only to play.

ENCOURAGING TRENDS IN DPEP

DPEP reports and other government documents suggest that new initiatives/educational reforms are successful because of the following commonalities across various districts:

- The new way of teaching has made learning fun and increased school enrolment.
- Sharing of the same language/dialect by teachers and students makes communication easier and increases the learning capacity of students.
- DPEP has changed the use of excessive corporal punishment though not eliminated it.
- The relationship between young students of classes I and II and the teachers is more personal and affectionate.
- The teaching-learning process has also improved because of programmes such as the Active School Programme (ASP) in Maharashtra and the EGS in Madhya Pradesh. These often run parallel to the primary schools. The former have been seen to enable greater interaction between students and teachers because of the informal nature of their curriculum, a trend that is confirmed by the micro studies in Section II. For instance, as reported from Shahdol district, Madhya Pradesh, the EGS-led self-learning and Seekhna Sikhana programmes impart education based on graded textbook, self-learning and teaching by a traditional Guruji. They do not have what we conventionally know as classes, but work with groups of children at different levels, encouraging them to assess their own level and join the appropriate group. The teacher here is more familiar to both the community and student, often belongs to the same community and speaks the same dialect or language. This method of level-based learning spread over classes I to V, is a pattern that other states could well emulate to make their programme more successful. A similar programme works in Rajasthan under the Shiksha Karmi Project where teachers are more familiar and accessible.
- The curriculum is planned systematically. Students not only study together but are assigned responsibilities as well, both within the class and outside it. Teachers and parents know each other personally and in most schools, there is some involvement of parents in both academic and non-academic activities. Regular contact is

maintained with parents through meetings, MTAs, co-curricular activities and schemes such as the midday meal.

- Some schools have been able to inculcate a sense of community and do interesting and exceptional work such as motivate students to do group study. Teachers contribute monetarily to relief work, and some also engage in promoting adult literacy in the village as well as create a sense of community participation through various activities.
- The BRCs and CRCs in most districts have adopted the method of surprise checks and assessment of teacher performance in school. This has worked towards positive teaching as the teachers are rewarded for their performance financially and by upgrading their positions. The district administration is directly involved in disseminating the new system.

Apart from the academic changes that DPEP has brought about, most districts report that:

- School buildings are more attractive.
- Where needed, more rooms have been built.
- More toilets and tube-wells have been provided.
- More teachers have been appointed.
- Self-learning stimulates the children to learn better.
- Repeated training has improved teacher morale and input.

While these changes are welcome, one needs to question whether they are generic and representative of empirical reality, or whether the information contained in the reports is selective.

EXTERNAL LINKAGES THAT MAKE THE SYSTEM WORK

Where DPEP has succeeded we need to recognise that often the task has been made easier by the working of alternate strategies alongside the DPEP. These include the EGS, the ASP and the contribution of NGOs. They have enabled the generation of an overall positive environment towards education that helps in the eventual success of any new learning measure and its implementation, such as DPEP.

For example, there are several reasons why the literacy campaign has succeeded in Kerala, not least of them being the fact that many of the

communities here are matrilineal and therefore value girls and their education. Special care has been taken at the state level to engage in enrolment drives focused on tribal areas. In Palakkad district an active role was played by the Primary Education Development Society of Kerala (PEDSK). The local administration in Palakkad has also been active in ensuring adherence to standards through constant monitoring.

A similar situation obtains in Mallapuram district where the Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP)—again, an NGO—was responsible for a general pedagogic renewal at the local level. Officials of the KSSP played an active role as trainers and successfully organised community support through word of mouth and written materials. The SCERT and the SRG played an extensive role in monitoring and creating and disseminating learning material. The district also succeeded in initiating a parental support group that participated in the planning of teaching aids and school-work, maintaining a mother's diary that documented a ward's progress, and in organising extra school activity.

The success of DPEP in Kerala has not been just due to the teachers' and the administration's drive for education but also due to the fact that the people are culturally oriented towards education—an orientation reflected in Vidyarambha, a traditional ceremony performed for 3-year-olds to initiate them into schooling. Augmenting this was the catalytic role played by the two NGOs—KSSP and PEDSK.

However, rather than depend on NGOs, the state of Karnataka initiated its own alternative education programme that proved to be fairly effective. In both Mandya and Mysore districts, besides the launch of DPEP in 1995, a local programme of joyful learning called Nali Kali, already in practice in other areas, was initiated to enrich the education process. The programme, which was similar to Vesavi Badi in Andhra Pradesh, was oriented towards teachers as well as students and communities, and involved such activities as wall newspapers, a teacher's magazine for sharing ideas and experiences, booklets for resource persons on training, a training plan for headmasters created with the help of ISEC, Bangalore, booklets on supervising building and construction of schools, audiotapes of songs, stories and riddles derived from the local culture, sensitising the community to its disparities and discriminatory practices, street plays and other theatre activity. This programme was combined with the state's education policy to reach the concerned community. Several festive occasions, such as a VEC mela and a Metric mela that engaged students in the practical assessment of what they learnt at school, were also organised at the community level. Notwithstanding mixed reports on the

effectiveness of the Nali Kali programme across the state, it has garnered community support and has enabled high retention rates.

An ASP started two years ago in one of the schools in Latur district, Maharashtra, now covers over a 100 schools. The highlights of this programme are its emphasis on self-study and peer learning; supporting activities such as display boards on which news clippings, information and pieces of creative writing are put up; a self-monitored attendance system and a reading corner. The Latur model also includes art, work experience and physical education besides academics in the evaluation of students.

THE COOKIE CRUMBLES— DISCRIMINATION AND INEQUALITY

The analysis thus far presents a picture of fortitude and perseverance in the face of a tradition-bound mindset and definite value orientations. The intense effort made at the district level by programme officers, the VEC, BRC, CRC and other functionaries along with the teachers themselves, have made DPEP successful in most of its attempts to increase access, enrolment and retention.

There is, however, another cause for concern. As is evident from the CPS, the focus of the DPEP policy on the need for gender equality and the elimination of social discrimination, whether caste-based or ability-based, remains unaddressed.

SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION AND GENDER BIAS

Social discrimination can be understood in various ways. In a country like India, where approximately 76 per cent of the population still lives in rural India and where patriarchal social norms have prevailed for centuries along with a rigid social organisation based on the caste system, enabling social and attitudinal change has not been an easy task. Discrimination along the lines of caste and gender is rampant, making the system socially disabling. Take, for example, caste. The caste or community identity plays a large role in a person's ability to access education or withdrawal from the schooling system (see Chapters 10 and 12). On the other hand, it may even prompt interest in the schooling system as education is seen as a status marker by many castes. The latter, for instance, is found to be the case in Betul district (see Chapter 8), which is dominated by an

upwardly mobile community comprising OBCs. In search of an upgraded social identity, this community encourages its children to access education, which it views as a sign of newly acquired status, which in turn enables them to be the dominant caste in the region.

Social discrimination is also found in the context of tribal people who have been seen for centuries as 'different, uncivilised and isolated'. Such notions are carried over into the education system in the most insidious of ways, and become a part of student socialisation. The assumption that SC/ST students are a particular kind of 'incapable' category creates a situation that warrants no special efforts be made on their behalf. That such communities are incapable is an attitude that disregards the role played by factors like traditional socialisation, seasonal migration and traditional economic practices such as 'jitam' and 'pali' that are based on bonded labour (see Chapters 10 and 12), rooted in social discrimination. These factors can and do affect access to education in rural India.

Discrimination in the school is reflected in the manner in which teachers direct their efforts towards particular children. For instance, one of the essential elements of DPEP is the recommendation for remedial classes for disadvantaged students. Of the 14 districts under survey here, only Thiruvannamalai and Dharmapuri districts in Tamil Nadu even mention remedial classes for SC/ST students.

Teachers also distinguish between the less and more intelligent and are biased towards promoting the work of the latter (Nanded district report [Paranjape 2000: 27]). Another example of this attitude can be seen in Lalitpur district, Uttar Pradesh, where the school for the SC community is outside the village settlement (see Lalitpur district report [Arora 2000: 5]). The micro study from Cuddalore district (see Chapter 13) reveals the existence of a separate school for the SC community. There is clear indication of the fact that the school is discriminated against in terms of resource allocation and general social attitude because it is an 'SC' school. Such caste-based discrimination is also found in the constitution of the VEC. Here, in addition to caste, gender also rears its ugly head. Women representatives in the VEC often remain silent, or they do not attend meetings at all; instead, their signatures are obtained before or after the meeting (see Chapters 10 and 12).

The study from Kolar reveals how there is a definite earmarking of students belonging to a particular community, with caste distinctions being subtly maintained by allotting certain tasks, like fetching water for the teachers, to only some children (see Chapter 11). Such continued physical and social segregation is one of the many ways through which social

inequality is perpetuated. In village settlements, this practice not only highlighted social ranking but also translated social inequality into physical separation, making the basis of social discrimination even more rigid.

Discrimination against girls is also widely prevalent, though it is played out more subtly in the language used by the teachers, the content of textbooks where lessons are largely male oriented, or in the segregation of children on the basis of gender by seating them separately within the classroom. Recent studies of Betul and Hisar districts confirm the persistence of a segregated pattern of seating children (see Chapters 8 and 10). Though these particular forms of discrimination have not been witnessed in Nanded district, Maharashtra, that it exists is clear from the fact that boys are asked twice as many questions as girls. In Lalitpur district, Uttar Pradesh, while parents claim that they send their children to school since they want to overcome 'ling bhed' (gender discrimination), the teachers continue to seat these very children separately in class, and differentiate between the more and less intelligent students. In primary schools in Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh, girls and tribal children are particularly discriminated against. Since the general assumption is that they are incapable of learning, these students are constantly passed over by the teacher and not given much attention. This form of discrimination may appear to be minor, but it is an essential component of students' socialisation process—a matter that needs careful consideration since what is minor can help entrench awareness of larger differences in young minds.

The wheel, however, turns both ways. If there is a tendency to discriminate against the needy, there is also a way in which the latter can use the system to their advantage. The report from Lalitpur shows that most people are from socially disadvantaged categories and send their children to school in the hope of getting the promised 3 kilograms of wheat per month (Lalitpur district report [Arora 2000: 7]). Further, the attendance of many girl students is irregular due to familial duties. Many of them are married between ages 12 and 15 and come to school only to claim the scholarship (ibid.: 15).

The schools in Chithoor, Andhra Pradesh, deal with the problem by setting up *anganwadis* and *balwadis* in a bid to prevent pre-schoolers from joining regular school. In order to circumvent parents from sending their girl children to school only in order to take advantage of the benefits they receive, such as the midday meal and the 3 kilograms of grain, particular attention is paid to their attendance.

However, the attitude is more positive in the EGS such as that in Shahdol (Shahdol district report [S. Sharma 2000: 53]). According to the CPS for Shahdol, 'A culture of inclusion is witnessed in the EGS as against a culture of exclusion in government schools ... weak students are isolated and ignored in the PS as compared to the EGS ...' (ibid.: 54).

It is this culture of exclusion that lies at the root of the entrenched practice of social discrimination prevalent in rural India and must be dealt with through the education system, if change and social progress is to be achieved.

The general nature of the problem, with regard to social equity and gender discrimination and the failure to deal with it, can finally be gauged from this final case of complete discrimination reported from Palakkad district, Kerala (Palakkad district report [Bhat 2000: 100–01]). However, the data contained herein is not necessarily unique to the Kerala context, but is reflective of the general situation that prevails in various districts; it also speaks volumes about the resource person's objectivity and ability to read between the lines.

The report reveals:

1. Separate seating arrangements for boys and girls—found in all schools.
2. Formation of separate groups during activity in class—found in all schools.
3. Teacher's biased use of language that creates consciousness of the gender distinctions—found among most teachers.
4. Providing greater opportunity for one group over another—found among many teachers.
5. Group leaders from one category only—found among some teachers.

From the findings listed, one can see that points three, four and five are reflective of a general teacher bias. If there is any positive attitude towards the girl child as, for instance, in the urban areas of Kerala, it is probably due to the matriarchal system that is prevalent in the state.

Further, the same researcher also lists the following discriminatory practices in Palakkad classrooms that affect children's equality of educational opportunities:

- Children belonging to disadvantaged communities and groups are seated separately.

- Distinct preference is shown by teachers to children from forward communities, as is reflected in the choice of group leaders supervising and assisting learning.
- There is a disproportionate expression of pleasure in the work done by children from forward communities.
- The general impression conveyed by teachers in interviews is that they believe that 'some children just cannot learn' as they are from a particular community.
- Many teachers claim that they find it difficult to deal with the learning needs of certain children.
- There are statements by teachers that these children have no motivation to attend school, except maybe the midday meal, as they totally lack parental support (ibid.: 101-02).

DISABILITY

Discrimination also extends to people who are physically handicapped. Those who are identified as handicapped not only face physical challenges but are also subject to stereotypical social imagery that further compounds the discrimination. DPEP's aim to particularly address these issues and focus educational reform on special strategies for the girl child, the disabled and the SC and ST categories, is thus well-intentioned.

Unfortunately, there is no district among the 14 reviewed where gender discrimination or negative attitudes towards the socially backward or disadvantaged, is absent. Among these, Dharmapuri in Tamil Nadu is the only district with a school for handicapped children. In Betul district, teachers covered by the micro study are not sure how to even define 'disability' and disabled children (see Chapter 8). Similarly, in Kolar district the disabled are not even 'thought about' (see Chapter 11). Other studies carried out in Warangal, Kolar and Hisar districts (see Section II) show the presence of very few disabled children in the population. Those that are visible are found within the regular DPEP schools without any special care being provided to them. In fact, such studies also reveal how perceptions of disability differ at the local level, and that an awareness of the need for special care or/and special education is woefully lacking. Creating sensitivity about these issues is an important area and should be included as part of the DPEP package for the village educator.

Though DPEP gives teachers special training to deal with handicapped children, the percentage of teachers who sign on for such training is

insignificant. The Vidyavahini volunteers in Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh, are the only teachers who have sought training in dealing with disability. It is interesting that none of the reports mention any kind of qualitative or quantitative input with regard to handicapped children, their schooling or the social attitudes towards them. Nowhere is there even a reference to disabled children in any of the classes in any of the schools surveyed. Nor do they feature in teacher conversations or in interviews by resource persons; this in itself is reflective of a certain bias.

DISCRIMINATION WITHIN THE TEACHING COMMUNITY

An interesting but disturbing fact that emerges from the above studies is that there is discrimination within the teaching community itself, both in terms of sex and age. This is reflected in differential workloads, participation in administrative tasks, a lack of involvement with students and their parents, the attitude towards absenteeism and in dealing with activities such as the midday meal. Female and younger teachers usually get a heavier workload. This is despite the fact that the presence of female teachers acts as an incentive for parents to send their daughters to school.

The situation in schools in Latur district is illustrative. In one of them, the lone female teacher does not mix with the male teachers. Also, younger teachers do not fraternise with older ones, nor do they share the same pedagogy. Older teachers are resistant to the new ASP. Assignment of classes also depends on the age and sex of the teacher (see Latur district report [Gupte 2000: 38]). In the study of Kolar district, Karnataka, it is seen that there is a high magnitude of association between teacher gender and dalit/tribal and female student test scores. Female teachers appear to elicit a better performance from students, perhaps because they are viewed as being more sensitive than male teachers (see Kolar district report [Clarke 2000: 47]). And yet female teachers are not treated at par with their male counterparts. Biases that prevail in society at large are thus carried to the school compound.

It is necessary to consider the above aspects of discrimination if we are to understand how a system that is insidiously unequal will or can impart an education and create an awareness that is free, fair, unbiased and futuristic in its outlook when the proponents of the system themselves are its victims as well.

CONCLUSION

It is true that overall decline in access, infrastructure, functionality and quality affect all children. However, given the prevailing social inequalities and hierarchies, poor children are more acutely affected, particularly the girls among them, than children from more privileged groups, who are in any case increasingly opting to move from government to private schools. And even if they do attend government schools, there is growing evidence of private tuitions supplementing school instruction.

The general impression conveyed by the classroom process reports supported by the quantitative data, figures and percentages in other government documents, is one of an overall improvement. This judgement is based on the presentation of the following across the board conclusive facts within these reports:

- The figures of enrolment are higher.
- Rates of retention are higher.
- Corporal punishment has been removed or reduced considerably.
- Lighter work loads have been introduced.
- TLM is more exciting.
- Teachers and students have more personalised relations.
- Community participation has improved.
- The administration is more involved.
- The infrastructure is renewed.
- Alternate strategies such as the EGS, AS and the Nali Kali approach.
- NGOs such as the KSSP have been successful.

Nevertheless, a word of caution is warranted because even today:

- Teachers continue to use derogatory language.
- SC/ST students are consistently passed over during question-hour sessions in class.
- SC children are seated separately.
- Parents of these children are believed to be incapable of understanding the needs of their wards and therefore the teachers do not interact with them.
- Tribal schools are the worst off in terms of teacher absenteeism, attendance and infrastructure.

- Younger siblings accompany the older ones to school.
- Girls still drop out.
- Many only come to take the monthly stipend or the cereal ration that the state provides.
- Most children still do not have uniforms or textbooks.
- In the monsoon and harvest seasons, attendance continues to drop.
- Disability or disabled children do not even find mention in the voices of teachers, parents or researchers.
- Girls and boys still sit in separate rows.

These shortcomings have reasons that can be explained, and a concerned administration and a 'gender-sensitive and socially aware' teacher should try and address them if DPEP is to achieve all its objectives. In the face of the kind of discrimination reported, attaining the avowed goals will involve a long and uneasy journey. Moreover, if the school and the community are at cross-purposes, the problems will remain unresolved and the horse will not drink water! DPEP cannot succeed in its intentions unless it attempts a comprehensive plan of reform that is aimed not just at the school and the students enrolled therein, but also involves, as a first step, educating the community and the teachers themselves.

It is not enough for the teachers to receive the few days of in-service training that introduces them to new teaching methods; instead, they need to learn to re-examine their social attitudes and culturally-bound responses to gender and other forms of 'difference'. The absence of this sensitivity is where the perpetuation of discrimination begins. This is not a matter to be taken lightly, for teachers, after parents, are the primary socialisation agency in any society. And here they are the prime movers behind DPEP.

If we believe that a 'hierarchy of access' exists within DPEP (see Chapters 3 and 4) we need to reckon with the fact that there is also a 'hierarchy of dissemination' in the imparting of education. In addition, based on recent data from several districts and the clear information emerging from interviews and group discussions that resource persons have had with their subjects in these districts, it is seen that girls are the first to be withdrawn from school whenever there is an economic, social or familial crisis. In conversations with young, school-going boys and girls, a desire for role-reversal was clearly expressed by the girls, whereas boys often spoke of the hardness of a girl's life. It is also seen that there is a very low level of achievement among children from these schools. Families

that send their daughters to school tend to seek a minimum level of learning for them, and rarely make any effort towards getting them a higher education.

In other words, along with a hierarchy of access and dissemination, we must also consider the fact that there is a 'hierarchy of aspirations' as well. Each of these three hierarchies strengthens the inequalities, reflects deep-rooted biases and maintains the status quo that prevails at the district level. This situation is compounded by a conflict of interest between the planners, the administration and what the parents expect and the teachers deliver. There is also an obvious problem of perception on the part of the teaching community with regard to their role as disseminators of a new pedagogy and what they owe the community.

Thus, if DPEP is to be truly successful, pedagogic revolution at the district level is not going to be enough. A high degree of cultural sensitivity is needed if the programme is to impact on traditional customs and values that teachers carry with them that hinder equal access to education by both boys and girls and largely shape perceptions at the local level. Only when age-old, socio-cultural barriers rooted in religion, caste and traditional social organisation are recognised and crossed, can equal opportunity for education be available to all. The process of sensitisation, as mentioned earlier, has to occur on three levels: the community, the teachers and the administration.

As a final comment, the manner in which qualitative and quantitative assessments are made—or not made—of attitudes towards disability and gender discrimination at the school level, is also reflective of a certain bias among researchers. This bias needs to be removed if they hope to provide a comprehensive overview of the actual success of DPEP vis-à-vis education for the girl child and the economically and socially disadvantaged. DPEP needs to pause, reevaluate and rethink its strategies: by not addressing the issues of gender, equity and other forms of discrimination discussed in the preceding sections, the programme abdicates its role as a change agent. A system that suffers from such structural amnesia about a certain group of people because they are 'different' deludes itself and fails to achieve its purpose.

TWO

QUALITATIVE MICRO STUDIES

7 AN OVERVIEW OF MICRO STUDIES

Vimala Ramachandran
Aarti Saihjee

Since its inception in 1994, DPEP has emerged as a crucial intervention in the field of primary education and has contributed significantly towards the attainment of universal primary education in the last decade. The preceding section of this volume, on the basis of secondary data, has attempted to shed light on the impact of DPEP on its self-identified target groups—girls as well as marginal social groups, namely SCs and STs. A major portion of the secondary data in question has been quantitative and is undoubtedly an outstanding source for accessing a breadth of information regarding ‘How many?’ or ‘How much?’ in relation to primary schooling. The focus has been on aggregates, glossing over the differential impact of these initiatives at the village level or on different groups of people within the village, district, state, etc. It is not surprising that DPEP’s gender and social equity indices in turn find themselves limited by their own quantitative definitions (see Chapter 2). The breadth of data generated has not been sufficient to do justice to the complexity of social and gender issues that frame DPEP’s implementation in innumerable panchayats across the country.

While conducting the desk study, a need was thus felt to go beyond the macro picture and focus intensely on the micro level through a process that is more interpretive and is able to provide an in-depth exploration of the extant quantitative findings. It was proposed that a series of qualitative micro studies be carried out to provide depth of information regarding the underlying motivations, feelings, values, attitudes and perceptions of ordinary parents, teachers, children as well as the community regarding primary schooling and the impact of DPEP. The objective of the exercise was to recognise the human face behind the sanitised statistics. Who gets

to go to school as opposed to who remains out of school and why? Who goes to which primary school (government, alternate or private school) and why? What kind of teaching and learning takes place within a classroom? How does community support for education manifest itself at the panchayat level? These are some of the questions that these micro studies would set out to answer.

The states selected for this exercise are Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. These micro studies have been instrumental in generating rich data that highlights the importance of the local context (political, social and economic) within which DPEP initiatives are implemented and impart a more textured and nuanced understanding of 'education' in rural India. The rest of the chapter is devoted to briefly outlining the specific methodology used in the micro studies as well as capturing the similarities and differences of the DPEP experience across the six states and highlighting the chasm, at times widening and sometimes narrowing, between the rhetoric and reality of policy initiatives. Before proceeding further, a caveat is in order here. The objective of this exercise is not to pronounce generalisations on the basis of these micro studies; rather, it is to provide insight into the underlying issues most pertinent to the topic under study. Hence, all comments and observations should be taken in the spirit in which they are intended.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for these micro studies is primarily qualitative and interpretive in nature and attempts to capture the local dynamics that frame social and gender equity issues in primary schooling in DPEP districts across the country. The districts were selected by virtue of being DPEP phase I districts (with the exception of Andhra Pradesh) as well as having a sizeable SC/ST population so as to be able to reflect the social complexity of local contexts (see Box 7.1). Similar criteria have been used to select the research block as well as the panchayat. The selection was done in tandem with state and district authorities; however, the choice of the panchayat was left to the discretion of the principal researcher (with the exception of Madhya Pradesh) so as to preclude any obvious bias.

As DPEP was initiated in phases and given that not all districts are at the same level, it was decided to identify five panchayats from DPEP-I

Box 7.1**Selection criteria of panchayat for micro study**

- Districts chosen on the basis of percentage of SC (20 per cent and above) and ST (40 per cent and above) population; DPEP-I districts and Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Programme (Andhra Pradesh PEP) districts.
- Similarly, block chosen using the same criteria—significant SC or ST population, DPEP to have been operational for over four years.
- Panchayat selection—representative with respect to special focus groups, DPEP inputs for over four years, with (preferably) AS, EGS, bridge course camps, NFE (i.e., one or more other primary education facilities, institutions); presence of pre-school—either ICDS or private/NGO or education department ECCE. Not on the main road and not too remote either. Panchayats to be chosen by the field researcher immediately before commencement of field trip (no prior selection/information to the selected panchayat).

District selected/Principal researcher

- Betul, Madhya Pradesh: Aarti Saihjee
- Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu: Aruna Rathnam
- Hisar, Haryana: Vandana Mahajan
- Kolar, Karnataka: Vani Periodi
- Surguja, Chhattisgarh: Vidya Das
- Warangal, Andhra Pradesh: Kameshwari Jandhyala

districts and one from where the Andhra Pradesh PEP has been operational for over 10 years. This strategy was successfully used in all the states, with the exception of Madhya Pradesh where the state government controlled the selection of the panchayat and the researcher could not influence this selection. While Betul meets the criterion outlined in the selection of the district and the block, the same cannot be said in relation to the research panchayat and, as we shall see, this has had important implications for the actual micro study. Each micro study was designed to yield an in-depth qualitative analysis of one panchayat. It focused primarily on the educational facilities and infrastructure available at the primary level, and included:

- Age-specific demographic data of children in the 6–11 and 11–14 age-groups.
- Listing of schools—GPS, AS/EGS and private schools.

- Detailed enrolment data in various classes from one GPS, one AS/EGS and one private school (recognised and/or unrecognised).
- Focus group discussions with VEC, MTA, women's group and with the most deprived/poor community within the village (a dalit community, a migrant group or any group that is perceived by the community as being the poorest in the village).
- Cohort study of one batch of students currently studying in class IV or V in the government school and EGS.
- In-depth interviews with two teachers in GPS, one from EGS and one from the private school.
- Classroom observation for two to three days and informal interactions with children and their parents.

The methodology was decided upon in consultation with a few experts and researchers and circulated among the principal investigators; it sought to combine direct observation, informal conversation, open-ended interviews and focus-group discussions to capture the local dynamics of access, enrolment and retention in primary schooling at the micro level, especially in the last five years. The primary foci of these studies were the children, teachers, parents and the community (especially its manifestation with regard to school committees) and their experiences of schooling. School registers were examined and were extremely essential in documenting current enrolment patterns according to gender, caste and community, as well as for a cohort analysis of the current primary class of 2001 to ascertain trends regarding retention and dropouts. Open-ended interviewing was actively encouraged to explore and understand the attitudes, opinions, feelings and behaviour of individuals, especially teachers. Direct observation was most helpful in documenting classroom processes to amplify the teaching and learning that takes place in school as well as flesh out the impact of the social identities of teachers and students in framing these interactions (see Box 7.2).

Focus-group Discussions (FGD) with women, social groups (SC/ST), as well as the VEC were also heavily relied upon to capture the intangible social and gender dimensions of DPEP that is partly framed by people's perceptions and subjectivity. It was observed during these FGDs that shared experiences provided a fertile ground on which to build discussions, thus providing a higher volume and quality of information as opposed to groups with widely varying experiences. All this information was further supplemented by informal conversations with relevant people, primarily

Box 7.2

Guidelines for classroom observation

On arriving for the fieldwork, start with observation. Sit in the class and observe the teacher, the children and the overall environment. Absorb the atmosphere in the government primary school and AS/EGS/NFE (if any). The following issues need to be focused on:

- How children are sitting—caste-wise, gender-wise and any other form of segregation (economic/child's appearance).
- Whom does the teacher communicate with when asking questions, etc.? Her/his eye contact with children (all, few—if so who and their characteristics). Who is chosen for activities, to come to the board, recite a poem or rhyme, etc.?
- Whom does the teacher pass over?
- Cleanliness of the classroom—and if you get to the school early enough, check on who cleans the classroom.
- Drinking water—where it is kept, children's access to it (explore lack of access to some children). Do some children run out to a hand pump and drink water while others use the pot in the school?
- School infrastructure—describe (*pucca*, *kuccha*, state of the building—take a photograph with permission of all the three schools you visit—this will be used for analysis and will not be published or otherwise publicised; checklist to look at—building, number of rooms, toilets, water source, display of TLM, library books (how many and where they are kept).
- Midday meal—when is it served? What is the distribution/sitting arrangement? Utensils—do children bring their own plates? Do some children bring their plates? If so, who? (There could be a problem in some areas if the supplies have not reached.)
- Are there any disabled children in the class? If so, describe.
- Observe where teacher sits, keeps TLM and other materials.

in their role as parents and community elders. Given the time constraints (up to five days in the village), heavy reliance was placed on key informants to provide an overview of the panchayat as well as DPEP interventions in the last five years and its impact on primary schooling. The main strength of this methodology has been its flexibility to adapt itself to specific local contexts by giving researchers the space to redefine the issues during the process of doing research.

EMERGING ISSUES

This section attempts to identify the issues that resonate across the different studies with regard to gender and social equity in primary schooling. The research team met for a three-day intensive workshop to share their ideas and experiences with each other as well as to flesh out the primary issues that emerged from the larger study, especially the micro studies. The studies traverse a broad canvas of experiences in primary schooling that lie between the two extremes mirrored by the ubiquity of dismal statistics in Chhattisgarh and the ‘wonderland’ of primary education in Madhya Pradesh. It is observed that while at times the identified issues are played out in a similar manner across diverse contexts, in other instances the same issues take on completely different hues with different social consequences. It needs to be qualified at this point that although the issues discussed here to some extent impact on all children, some children—by virtue of being girls or belonging to certain social groups—experience these events differently and often with severe social consequences. Some of the important issues are discussed below.

PRIORITISING EDUCATION

A tangible impact of DPEP has been the accompanying social processes by which ‘education’ has been lodged firmly in the rural agenda in DPEP districts. All six micro studies reviewed here clearly indicate that the local demand for children’s education is growing by leaps and bounds. This is not to say that the demand did not exist before; but rather that DPEP, especially through its Lok Sampark Abhiyan (LSA) in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, as well as similar surveys in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, has been able to practically isolate the ‘out-of-school’ children, shine the spotlight on them and in the process tried to convince the larger community of its collective responsibility to educate children as opposed to letting the burden fall on individual families. Thus it is not surprising to find that while peer pressure seems to work as an effective mechanism to ensure enrolment and attendance in school in Madhya Pradesh, the Chhattisgarh study (Chapter 9) contrarily observes that ‘the increasing emphasis laid on education and on sending children to school by the different government functionaries has made the community “silent” on this aspect [non-attendance], so it even becomes difficult to assess the reasons behind children not attending school’.

UNPACKING ACCESS—THE NEW SEGREGATION

Physical access to a functioning school, at least on the surface, has emerged as a non-issue in all the studies except Chhattisgarh, where it is still an issue because of extant dysfunctional GPS as opposed to lack of schools. In large parts, access has been eased by the introduction of new GPSs and private schools in the south (Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka) as opposed to burgeoning private schools in Haryana and EGS in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. However, there is an urgent need to unpack—to explain and to explore—the term ‘access’ to schools, as it is observed that it glosses over several important issues. One such issue is that within the larger context of universal access, there is an emerging trend whereby children belonging to different social backgrounds are attending different schools. In Andhra Pradesh, there is a divide between the dalit basti GPS and the main hamlet GPS and only SC students attend the former school, while the latter has very few SC students. The youth in the SC colony in the Andhra Pradesh study were categorical that even if children from the SC colony try to seek admission in the other GPS, they are discouraged and told to attend the school in their own colony. A similar divide is observed in Tamil Nadu and is made all the more significant by the glaring disparities between the infrastructure of the two schools in favour of the non-dalit school. In both these studies, local private schools are also vying for students and most of the children who go to these schools are from relatively well-off families as well as backward and forward caste families. In Andhra Pradesh, there was no clear information regarding 155 children between the ages of 6–14; according to the mandal resource person, they are probably in private schools outside the village. This seems to be a valid assumption, given the fact that six private school buses ply in the research village.

There seems to be a strong belief in rural India that private schools instil discipline, are better organised since each class has a teacher, and their main advantage is that the child learns English. Despite evidence to the contrary and the high fees charged, the belief and perception of private schools offering ‘quality’ education seems to be strengthening and is best illustrated by the situation in Haryana. Enrolment in private schools in the research panchayat reveals the exclusivity of its children in terms of social status as well as a large gender divide. While the village has almost an equal ratio of SC to OBC and forward caste population, more than 90 per cent children in the government school are from the SC community

and over 90 per cent private school-going children are from OBC and forward castes. Despite this high number, the proportion of forward caste girls is extremely low in all the schools, partly because of a low sex ratio in the age-specific population of the village. This is particularly noteworthy among the forward castes—Bishnoi, Jat Sikhs (Jat) and Mehta (Bania) communities. It is now well documented that sex ratios among the forward communities in Haryana are particularly skewed against girls. According to Mahajan, the phenomenon of the missing forward caste girls from village schools can also be attributed to their enrolment in ‘convent’ private schools of the nearby town, which have a transport pick-up facility. The Karnataka study, too, highlights the growing lure of private schools and yet at the same time also captures the struggle between the schools to establish their credibility in the community, especially when the local GPS can boast of similar or more facilities than the private school and is supported by the village power elite.

A different manifestation of the new dynamics of school segregation is evident in Madhya Pradesh where the newly introduced EGS schools are primarily attended by the ST community while the locally dominant Kurmi community (OBC) sends its children to the GPS. The issue of segregated schools is also further complicated by the presence of a separate girls’ primary school (a consequence of the political negotiations by the Kurmi community), which not only reinforces the parallel school system in the village but also reflects the socio-cultural attitudes of the different social groups. The segregated GPSs mainly cater to the OBC community and allow for the education of Kurmi girls while the co-educational classes of the EGS/AS are more reflective of the relaxed gender norms evident in tribal communities. Despite the lack of tangible evidence regarding the ‘performance’ of the different schools, local perceptions and opinion clearly consider the GPS to impart ‘quality’ education in comparison to the EGS, and is more ‘suited’ to the needs of the OBC children. In an interesting turn of events, the Chhattisgarh study turns the dichotomy evident in Madhya Pradesh on its head; the EGS schools here are monopolised by the OBC and the tribal elite, whereas the dysfunctional local GPSs have been transformed into the preserve of the poor tribal population.

Given the above empirical evidence, it is becoming apparent that the democratisation of access to schools is ironically being accompanied by a reification of a child’s caste, community and gender in defining which school he or she attends. This development has considerable equity implications, since it seems to be further reinforcing the stratification already extant in the Indian educational system. What is of particular concern is

that in the absence of objective criteria to actually rank these schools (with the probable exception of Chhattisgarh), the emerging social ranking seems to reflect larger social divisions in society and are primarily contingent on 'who goes to school where'.

REACHING THE HARDEST TO REACH

Despite universalising access, several special groups of children still remain hard to reach and constitute the majority of out-of-school children. These groups are identified in the different studies as child workers, special needs children and adolescent girls. The child workers have been targeted primarily through the concept of AS, with the intention of mainstreaming them in existing formal structures. These groups are most prominent in Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Chhattisgarh and actually fall in the category of 'indentured labour'. In Andhra Pradesh it is observed that most of the boys who are out of school are bonded child labour, called 'jeetagallu', where the boys are bonded to well-off families for agricultural work, watch and ward in the field or for grazing livestock. According to Jandhyala (see Chapter 12), 'The use of the term "out-of-school" children has tended to gloss over the issue of the existence of bonded children in the village. It is only in extended conversation with the teachers and community that the problem is named.' Although the Andhra Pradesh government has identified strategies to mainstream out-of-school children by running bridge classes through non-residential centres at the habitation level, residential bridge camps, community campaigns and drives and a closer monitoring at village level of the out-of-school children, it is observed that the jeetagallu consistently fall through the cracks. For instance, the cohort analysis reveals that among boys there are five dropouts. Of these dropouts, two have gone back to being bonded labour. At the time of writing this report, the researcher was informed that there are still about 32 children in the SC colony who are out of school. They include eight girls and 26 boys, 21 of whom are bonded labourers. What makes the issue more complicated is the fact that the practice is not exclusively observed in inter-community relations and is also documented between SC families. One of the reasons why the issue of bonded labour is not able to draw special attention is that it is seen as the responsibility of the mobiliser attached to Non-residential Bridge Course (NRBC) and not the primary schoolteacher. Since the current mobiliser is wearing multiple hats at the moment (he is also the designated teacher at the NRBC and

teaches the lower classes in the primary school as well), he is unable to do anything about it.

Similar experiences are reported from Haryana. Vandana Mahajan observes that there is a clearly visible practice of child labour, which has not been addressed at all by the school, VEC or the CRC and BRC. During discussions with the class V boys in the GPS, the issue of child labour bonded/contracted to local landlords emerged as an important area of concern. Several young boys (in the 11–14 age-group) are given away as ‘pali’ to the landlords on a yearly contract of Rs 3,000 to Rs 5,000 (plus food, some grain and clothes). They do a range of household and farm work and some are enrolled (on paper) in the AS. Although the teachers in the GPS were at pains to explain that child labour is no longer a problem in their village, there was enough circumstantial evidence of its prevalence during interactions with and visits to the poorer and SC communities in the village. According to the head teacher’s own rough estimate, presently there are 100–150 palis in the village. These children are from the SC community and work as palis in the landowning GC families in the same village. The Chhattisgarh study also mentions the presence of such a practice, though it does not document it in detail. There is no doubt that the issue of equity takes on a new dimension with the presence of child labour—both in inter- and intra-community interactions.

A glaring absence of strategies to cater to the special needs of children with disability is also observed in all the research panchayats, with the exception of Andhra Pradesh. Andhra Pradesh is the only study that highlights the state’s acknowledgement of the needs of disabled children. This is primarily because Warangal is one of the districts selected for a pilot initiative for Integrated Education and Development by DPEP (IED). The IED initiative in the research panchayat started in 1999 and a survey was undertaken to identify the ‘special needs’ children (five handicapped children in the SC colony, of which two are hearing impaired, two are mentally retarded [one of whom is also physically handicapped] and one has behavioural problems). Currently, only one hearing impaired girl in class IV and one mentally retarded boy in class V are in school, while the physically handicapped slow learner boy is enrolled in the NRBC. For the remaining children, records show that they are enrolled but are not attending school. While the identification has been done and aids provided, especially to the hearing impaired and physically disabled children, teachers are not equipped to deal with the special needs of these children, especially the slow learners. Despite this, these children seem comfortable and well integrated in regular classrooms and it was observed that other

children interact comfortably with them. There was little evidence of any support provided from the mandal resource group that was formed to assist the teachers to deal with these special needs; the effort being made was primarily an individual choice facilitated by the fact that the current headmistress had a daughter with a speech impediment and hence was sensitive to the issue. This is a far cry from Madhya Pradesh where, despite the initiatives at the district level, the concept of disability itself is unclear. In Chhattisgarh too the discourse on special needs is absent.

INFRASTRUCTURE

DPEP's gender and equity strategies included improvement of school infrastructure and provision of toilets for teachers and students. It was argued that improving school infrastructure could have a positive impact on enrolment and retention of children in school. The six micro studies confirmed that overall improvement in school infrastructure and facilities does make a difference. Conversely, lack of proper infrastructure—like the broken-down building of the GPS in Chhattisgarh—exerted a negative influence on teachers, students and the community. Low attendance, lack of interest among teachers and indifference of the community were linked to the crumbling school building. In Tamil Nadu, poor facilities (one-room thatched building) of the school in the dalit hamlet were cited as a proof of discrimination. Even a dirty swamp surrounded the new building constructed recently by the ADWB. The hand pump and toilet were right in the middle of a cesspool. These differences between schools within the same village raise doubts in the minds of the poor about the intention of the government to provide equal opportunities to all, irrespective of caste, community or economic status.

Another interesting thread that runs through the six micro studies is the issue of toilets. In almost all the schools, availability of toilets was perceived as being unimportant, at least at the primary stage, for children (girls and boys). Toilets in schools were mostly used by the teachers. Discussions with children revealed that they do not see toilet facilities as an encouraging or inhibiting factor in school attendance. On the other hand, availability of drinking water was an important issue—hand pump, well or access to water from a bore-well. In Chhattisgarh, the EGS children fetched water from a well that was considered 'dirty' and a few children were sent to the primary school (about a kilometre away from the EGS) to fetch water from the hand pump for the teachers. In all six panchayats,

children in government primary schools did not bring water bottles with them, but almost all the children attending private schools (observed in Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka) were seen carrying water bottles and lunch boxes with them.

INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, classroom processes, child-centred learning and pedagogic renewal are issues that have received a considerable amount of attention in DPEP. While a considerable amount of work has been done in this area, a coordinated and multi-dimensional approach (simultaneous work on curriculum, textbooks, teacher attitudes, pedagogic renewal, teacher-pupil ratio) has not been followed evenly in all DPEP-I districts. This unevenness is clearly reflected in the six micro studies.

While almost all the teachers interviewed in the course of the micro studies have participated in DPEP training workshops, not all of them are convinced about the value of child-centred pedagogy. Many of them have not internalised the spirit of the new approach and seem to apply 'techniques' mechanically. For example, in Tamil Nadu, the teachers were familiar with the new approach, but were not convinced—one of them used his cane to order children to sing! A few continued to use the stick. In Karnataka, the teachers' familiarity with the vocabulary and techniques did not always lead to change in classroom processes, but corporal punishment has definitely come down and there was little fear associated with school. This was also the case in Haryana and Madhya Pradesh. There was no evidence of impact in Chhattisgarh.

In most of the panchayats visited, there was not much change in teacher attitudes towards girls and children from very poor/socially disadvantaged groups. It is not that teachers discriminated against all girls—social class, cleanliness and performance also influenced behaviour. There was a clear bias in favour of the better performers and relatively better-off children (it must be noted that most of the children coming to government schools are from poor communities). The double impact of gender and social status was evident in the attention given to children by the teachers, allocation of work in the school, seating and in classroom interaction.

Discussions with teachers in all the six panchayats revealed that there was not much understanding of the family circumstances and special needs of first-generation learners. Similarly, teachers have little appreciation of the work burden of children and their inability to devote time to studies

when they get back home. In particular, the teachers were not sensitive to the predicament of girls putting in several hours of work in the house or the problem of boys who graze cattle before coming to school. They seemed to dismiss such children as low performers or bad students.

Discussions with the teachers did not reveal periodic or ongoing academic support given by the block, cluster or mandal resource centres. For example, in Andhra Pradesh the mandal resource person is engaged in checking enrolment in the school and non-residential centre—thereby playing an inspectorial role rather than an academic one. In Chhattisgarh, the BRC and CRC were guardians of data and records and again did not seem to provide sustained or regular academic inputs.

Another interesting revelation was the minimal use (if any) of TLM in the classroom. In some areas, funds for TLM have been discontinued in the academic year 1999–2000.

VEC AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community participation has been an integral part of the DPEP vocabulary. However, all six micro studies reveal that it is synonymous with the VEC or SBC (or any other formal committee instituted for alternative schools). These committees are the primary interface between school and community, and evidence from the field indicates that they either do not function or seem to function with a mechanical intensity rather than a genuine sense of participation and commitment. The VEC is dysfunctional in Chhattisgarh, and the last meeting of the VEC had been held more than a year ago and the records do not include signatures of members. The resolution supposed to have been approved in previous meetings to repair the school building has not been carried out. In Haryana, the functioning and responsibilities of the VEC are restricted to that of occasional get-togethers and celebration of national days like Independence Day and Republic Day. School-related issues are apparently not discussed in any of the village forums, whether it is the VEC or the gram panchayat and gram sabha or the village development committee. According to Vandana Mahajan, seven VEC members (out of 12) participated in discussions with the field study team, along with three special invitees. Children of only two members were studying in the government primary school. The children of the remaining members were either going to private schools or were below the age of six. They admitted that the VEC does not meet regularly and this is not surprising given that the

children of most of the members attend private schools. In this year it has met only once to give approval for auctioning of trees inside the school campus, which fell during a storm.

Further, despite the mandated composition of VEC to ensure gender and social equity, in reality the VECs seem to uphold the interests of the dominant group. As per the DPEP Haryana norms, the VEC of this village should have representation from the SC community, women and two parents of children studying in the GPS, with the head teacher of the GPS as its member-secretary. However, in reality the official VEC has been 'replaced' by another VEC that has been constituted by the block office of the education department, resulting in a local power tussle. Membership of the Village Education Construction Committee (VECC), which is formed out of the VEC, is sought after because of the substantial funds transferred to VECC for the proposed school building:

It was quite shocking to see that members of the VEC were openly discussing the possibility of misappropriation of school building funds in front of the research team. In the view of the VEC members, its functioning and role is limited by the local level politics of using these bodies to exert influence, extract benefits and distribute patronage. Participation of the women members on the VEC was also not evident. Most of its members had no knowledge of their role, and importance of the VEC to address issues related to children's education (see Chapter 10).

Such politics tend to create a hierarchy between the various school committees based on the political clout they wield. In Andhra Pradesh, the teachers of the GPS in the dalit basti were aware of the play of caste and class factors in determining facilities for the school. They were unequivocal in stating that the school in the main village stands to gain by being in the proximity of the high school as well as having a majority of children from the dominant BC social group of the village. Consequently, their school committee is stronger, and therefore able to lobby for more benefits, better infrastructure, space, etc. This view was expressed during the discussions with the community in the SC colony as well. Similarly in Madhya Pradesh, caste identities were reflected in the school committees, with the VEC representing the OBC and the SMC representing the ST and the latter lacking resources to demand facilities for its school.

In Karnataka, the existing VEC was considered to be very active and efficient and claimed a high level of community participation. In reality,

the community here is reduced to a few elites who, according to Vani Periodi (see Chapter 11), 'participate, take decisions and implement according to their wish and others follow'. She further adds that though there are young people who are active and vocal in the SC community, their voices are not heard by the VEC. When they speak out in the gram sabha or in front of visiting officials, the elders are called and warned by the village elite. At the time of study, however, the state government had withdrawn the VEC and introduced a School Development and Monitoring Committee (SDMC) comprising parents of children attending the school. This new committee has not yet been constituted and it is already a source of much concern and friction in the community. The VEC was rather critical of this development as it challenged their authority. They were blunt in expressing their displeasure about ordinary people occupying the same position as them.

In the case of the VLC in Tamil Nadu, the situation is even more polarised. The committee hardly meets as some members live and work in Chennai. The headmaster is keen to have an operational VLC and keep the members informed about the school's needs, concerns and events. He admitted that convening a meeting was difficult. He meets each member of the VLC, writes a report in the format of a meeting and circulates it among the members for their signature. He meets the members again to get their views on the draft and transcribes the minutes to a book. Each member is expected to sign and pass it on to the others. The interesting aspect of the Tamil Nadu study is not the in-absentia functioning of the VLC; it is the only case study which actually documents genuine community participation by women's self-help groups and local dalit activists. Their participation is neither mechanical nor bureaucratised. Often, it is a highly political activism, especially in relation to the school in the dalit area. According to Rathnam, this is due to the presence of a village unit of the Dalit Panthers of India. Young dalit men spend time in the local school and take a few classes, so that the teacher can concentrate on another class. Their participation in teaching has helped the teacher cope with a multi-grade classroom. They pitch in with extra-curricular activities and provide continuous moral support to the teacher.

The teachers of both schools reported that the women's groups should be credited for the high rate of enrolment and retention at the primary level. They have been enthusiastic participants of enrolment campaigns at the beginning of every academic year for the past four years. Women's SHGs are not only active, but are also very clear about their role—they

see themselves as the support structure for the school. They keep in touch with the headmaster throughout the year, and their engagement with the school ranges from leading a procession of students for enrolment, supplying sweets during school functions, persuading parents to make extra efforts to enhance their wards' academic performance to demanding improved facilities for the school in panchayat meetings. Those who live close by allow the girls of the school to use the toilets in their houses. They provide drinking water to the students and also persuade reluctant neighbours into extending these facilities to the children. The Tamil Nadu experience also clearly marks the emergence of women's voices and the growing recognition that they are major players in the enterprise of getting children to school. Hence, apart from Tamil Nadu, we did not see any concrete evidence of DPEP efforts to encourage women to be more active at the local level through the creation of MTAs and holding of mother-daughter fairs and one-third reservation in the VEC (also reinforced by the PRIs). The situation on the ground, at least in the six panchayats covered, does not suggest active community participation.

Mechanical interpretation of community participation and equating it to an officially constituted VEC has not fostered genuine participation of families of children who attend government schools. Karnataka has made a beginning by dissolving the VEC and replacing it with a School Betterment and Management Committee comprising of parents of the children. It remains to be seen whether this new committee will have the teeth to monitor the regular functioning of the school.

COMPETING INEQUALITIES

The undeniable fact is that people, be they parents, teachers, children or community members, do not have one homogeneous identity and hence cannot be subsumed in a generic category—the community. While there are distinct social and economic groups like SC, ST or OBC, these categories also need to be further broken down in each specific context. Similarly, though gender is no doubt a source of stratification, it is also stratified along the lines of caste, class and community. Thus the experiences of a poor ST girl will be qualitatively different from that of an OBC girl and so on. In fact, the situation of girls in some forward communities could be worse in some areas. Similarly, in areas where boys migrate for work (like in the hotel belt of Karnataka), girls may have greater access by virtue of the fact that they remain in the village while boys are often

compelled to drop out from school and leave for the city. It is observed that DPEP's emphasis on broad categories of social stratification actually tend to render invisible the competing inequalities that define children's lives and their experiences of primary schooling. A primary source of inequality that is overlooked is the social and economic geographies of marginal settlements within the context of the larger panchayat and its impact on access to 'functional' schools. All studies point to this fact and elaborate upon the consequences of this spatial organisation.

Another issue that is overlooked is that all members of a social group do not necessarily share the same economic standing and there may be differences within the community. For instance, the practice of bonded labour occurs within the SC community across families—with some children working in the homes of richer SC families in the same village (see Chapter 12). There is also a local perception that the relatively better-off SCs who live on the periphery of the main settlement in the Andhra Pradesh study and whose children attend the main GPS, are of a different sub-caste and hence different from the rest. Similarly, the Majhwars in Chhattisgarh are classified as ST, as are the Kunwars. However, the similarity ends here, with the latter exhibiting a very high rate of literacy while the Majhwars are the landless labourers and barely 5 per cent of their children make it to school. The situation of children from Valmiki households is different from other SC groups in Haryana. Among the Sikh community, the social and economic situation of Jat Sikhs is far better than the Mazhabi Sikhs (SC community) living in the same village.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the outset, it needs to be reiterated that, with the exception of Chhattisgarh, almost universal enrolment in primary schools has become a reality. The number of never-enrolled children—girls and boys—is almost negligible. The presence of a functional upper-primary and secondary school exerts a significant influence on childrens' and parents' motivation to continue their education. The cohort analyses also reveal that the dropout rate at the primary level is very small and almost all the children go up to class four (in Andhra Pradesh) and class V (in other areas). The problem begins at the last stage of primary and post-primary level. Hence the availability of and accessibility to middle and high schools could dramatically change the educational scenario in rural India. This is of greater importance for girls and children from very poor families. The micro studies

reinforce this very significant finding of desk research. In keeping with the trends discussed in Section I, the micro studies also reveal that while the better-off have the resources to send their children outside the village, it is the poor who are left behind. However, the quality issue remains a challenge in almost all the areas. Learning achievements, pedagogic renewal, gender- and social class-sensitive classrooms, teacher attitudes—all these need a lot more work if we are to ensure good-quality education.

Decentralised micro planning under DPEP is expected to address context-specific issues and tailor the programme to reach out to the hardest to reach. However, the six micro studies reveal that this is not happening, even where village-level surveys have been done—like in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Further, these were undertaken by the teacher and other DPEP functionaries (like the social mobiliser in Andhra Pradesh). The overwhelming finding of the six micro studies is the need for panchayat-level micro planning to meet the educational needs of the most deprived in the area. The VEC and/or School Betterment and Management Committee have not been mandated to actively participate in planning nor do they have any decision-making power. Given the composition of the VEC, the children of most VEC members do not go to the government primary school. The members thus have little interest in the school, or the marginalised groups in the village. The composition and the role of VECs need to be reviewed (as it has been done in Karnataka) and these committees given more teeth.

The six micro studies reinforce many of the findings of the desk review (Section I of this book). DPEP has made a good beginning and has definitely put primary education on the priority list. Yet, it has a long way to go before inequalities are addressed and the most deprived children have meaningful access to schooling. DPEP may not be able to directly provide solutions to the gender and social inequalities that define every aspect of the Indian social, economic and political fabric. Yet, its success is inextricably entwined with its ability to critically engage and dialogue with the larger weave of Indian society, and thus constantly ensure that its programme is designed to do just that.

Since the completion of the fieldwork for the micro studies, we have had the opportunity to travel to Udipi, Uttara Kannada, Bellary and Davangere districts of Karnataka—three of them being non-DPEP districts.¹ The overwhelming impression we gathered was that, at least in the villages we visited in Karnataka, there is a negligible number of out-of-school children in the 6–11 age-group. Primary schools were functioning and teachers were regular. However, what disturbed us was meeting a

large number of working children in the 11–14 age-group and an even larger number of them in the 15–18 age-group. Discussions revealed that many of them had dropped out after class IV, V or VI—with poverty and need for work cited as reasons for dropping out, even in the more educationally forward districts of Udipi and Uttara Kannada. Relevance of education (especially beyond the primary stage), lack of employable or self-employment related skills, insecurity about the future and economic pressures continue to push children out of school and into work. This observation is certainly quite different from the situation in Bijapur, Raichur and Koppal where a recent household survey reveals a large proportion of out-of-school children in the 6–11 age-group—but it is interesting to note that even when a district (like Udipi and Uttara Kannada) achieves universal enrolment and participation at the primary stage, ensuring eight years of basic education poses a major challenge.

Similarly, prior to the commencement of this research, a team of researchers was involved in documenting backward and forward linkages that strengthen primary education.² We covered two districts in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, one in Orissa and the cities of Hyderabad, Mumbai and Kolkata. Again, the overwhelming impression we gathered was that parents recognise the value of primary education, and notwithstanding their economic situation, are eager to send their children to primary schools. In the more educationally backward areas of the country, availability of a functional primary school remains a problem. In urban areas, accessibility of schooling for children in difficult circumstances and from migrant families continues to pose a major challenge. In almost all these areas a significant number of children drop out at the primary stage—with an overwhelming number of girls dropping out after class IV or V. Again, accessibility to and availability of post-primary education remains a problem in many areas.

The learning from a range of research studies done in the last 10 years reiterates that there are no shortcuts or magic formulae to address fundamental problems of access, equity and gender disparity on the one hand and quality, content and relevance on the other. Education has to be perceived as an integral part of people's survival and their fight for a life of dignity and self-respect. Different components like physical access, mobilisation, quality, teacher management and pedagogic renewal need to be addressed simultaneously—ensuring confluence and synergy. An integrated approach is necessary for meaningful change and lasting/sustainable impact. Also, just five years of primary education—classes I to V, age 6–11, is insufficient to ensure significant value addition and

in many cases even retention of basic literacy and numeracy, particularly for groups who have historically been denied education. Eight years of basic education is essential, needs to be recognised as the basic minimum and taken on as a non-negotiable.

Primary education is not a stand-alone activity and the government has to acknowledge the importance of looking back and looking forward. Pre-school is a critical input into primary education and conversely, upper primary education is also necessary to encourage and motivate children and their families to send children to primary schools. Moving one step forward, availability of relevant and good-quality vocational and life-skill educational opportunities, is essential to generate the necessary momentum for primary and upper primary education. The age span we are looking at is 3 to 18, with one level feeding into the other and higher levels creating the necessary suction effect for earlier stages.

There is a consensus that the primary responsibility of basic education has to be shouldered by the government because it alone has the mandate, the ability and the wherewithal to respond to the educational needs of the poor. This study, like several others, shows that it is the very poor who go to government schools. Enhancing the capabilities of the poor and providing them the tools to negotiate this unequal world from a position of strength requires political commitment and societal support. Investing in the development and growth of those who need it most is indeed the need of the hour. DPEP has indeed made a beginning with respect to primary education; the question is whether this momentum will be sustained at higher levels and for another decade. If it is, India may well be able to achieve the goal of UEE by the year 2010.

NOTES

1. Vimala Ramachandran and Aarti Saihjee travelled in the project areas of 'The Concerned for Working Children' between 24 September and 1 October 2001.
2. Educational Resource Unit was engaged in a DFID/GOI-supported research project to document experiences of 10 primary education programmes in India titled *Getting Children Back to School—Case Studies in Primary Education*, edited by Vimala Ramachandran. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003.

8 LONG LIVE THE ALPHABET!

REFLECTIONS FROM

BETUL DISTRICT, MADHYA PRADESH

Aarti Saihjee¹

Upon entering the classrooms of the various schools in the Egarim panchayat on the initial day of our field visit, the children welcomed us enthusiastically with a rather unique greeting—‘Khade ho’, ‘Jai Hind’ and ‘Jai akshar’! The greeting translates into English as ‘Stand up’, ‘Long live India’ and ‘Long live the alphabet!’ and creatively evokes the ‘alphabet’ as a metonym to convey a larger vision of an educated and immortal nation. We later discovered that the greeting is not unique to the research panchayat;² however, there is no doubt in our minds regarding its prophetic ring within the context of the Egarim panchayat³ in Betul district, Madhya Pradesh. Irrespective of the school we visited, be it the Government Primary Schools (GPS) or those functioning under the EGS, the classrooms were filled with young children eager to learn, some wearing neatly pressed uniforms, their shining satchels flung carelessly to the side and others in clothes that had seen better days, holding on to tattered plastic bags. Children sitting in orderly rows in the well-appointed GPS responding to a question being posed by their teachers, while others huddling in an informal circle poring over coloured beads in the dimly lit EGS classroom. Students attempting to master the art of writing, few on slates and some in their neatly covered notebooks; yet others persisting with pencil stubs barely long enough to be held between their fingers. These enduring images, albeit contrasting, bear testimony to the fact that

the Egarim panchayat has truly embraced the spirit of the 'alphabet'. At this moment in time it can confidently claim near-total enrolment and virtually no dropouts among children in the age-group of 6–14 years, irrespective of gender, class and community. A state of affairs that is truly significant given that very few panchayats across the nation can claim such a privilege.

This is no mean feat, given that several factors, at least on the surface, militate against the achievement of such a reality. It is not an exaggeration to state that most extant reports/studies on universal primary education usually highlight the dramatic increase in primary schools as well as enrolment in these schools on one hand and, on the other, speak of the consistent failure of the state to achieve 'universal' primary education in post-independent India, with Kerala and more recently Himachal Pradesh being the exceptions (NCAER 1999, PROBE Report 1999, Wazir 2000). What is significant here is that Egarim is located in Madhya Pradesh, a state that is consistently identified as a dismal performer and lumped with Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh to constitute the BIMARU states, an acronym that conjures up a policymaker's worst nightmare.⁴ Further, Betul is classified as an ST dominated district and largely exhibits the attendant social and economic features symptomatic of such a classification. Despite these odds, the Egarim panchayat has been successful in achieving total access, enrolment as well as retention in primary schooling. This study broadly attempts to locate this phenomenon within the larger context of innovative educational planning in Madhya Pradesh in the last decade and the continuing need for a decentralised and localised approach to educational planning embodied in the DPEP initiative.⁵

The Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission (RGSM) is the premier body in Madhya Pradesh entrusted with the task of universalising primary education through the externally aided DPEP in tandem with its own unique initiative of the AS/EGS.⁶ The first phase of DPEP covered 19 districts and the second has encompassed another 15, taking the current total up to 34 districts in Madhya Pradesh. The primary external funding for the initiative comes from the European Union. The concept of AS was introduced in 1995 across phase I districts to tackle the problem of dropouts by providing flexibility in schooling, not only in terms of timings but also through an innovatively designed curriculum determined by the learning pace of the child rather than externally imposed evaluations. These schools were launched primarily in order to tackle the needs of migrant and/or poor families where child labour is indispensable to household survival and is often disruptive of children's regular attendance in formal schools.

Lok Sampark Abhiyan (LSA), the Madhya Pradesh government's ambitious exercise in participatory rural appraisal of the state of primary education in DPEP districts, was carried out in 1996 (it has since been replicated recently in 2000), as a response to the dismal lack of information on the subject in the Madhya Pradesh Human Development Report, 1995. It was a mammoth undertaking, a door-to-door exercise in social mapping to ascertain the number of children between the ages of 5 to 15 years who do not have access to schools, who are enrolled in schools and those who are actually attending schools; and to build upon the successes of the Total Literacy Campaigns (TLC) of the early 1990s in creating/reinforcing social awareness regarding education and the privileged place it occupies in every individual's life, especially children. The appraisal was effective in highlighting the discrepancies between existing data and the ground reality, and indicated that non-enrolment was the pressing issue as opposed to increasing dropouts as had been initially thought (Vyasulu 2000).

This set the stage for the introduction of EGS to increase access to schools while reinforcing the decentralised vision of education planning implicit in DPEP and the innovative curriculum of AS. The EGS went a step further by firmly locating itself in community demand for education, empowering it to 'enforce the accountability of the state to universalise primary education and at the same time share[s] a part of the resource requirement' (Sharma and Gopalakrishnan 2000: 3).⁷ The process involved is rather simple, where a settlement with a population of 40 students in the age-group of 6–14 years (the number is reduced to 25 in the case of socially marginal groups or sparsely populated areas) and no school in the radius of 1 kilometre, can demand a primary education facility from the state. The government has to respond with a fully functional EGS within 90 days of receiving the demand.⁸ The scheme was introduced in January 1997, with the primary objective of providing minimum education facilities to socially, economically as well as geographically marginal groups in the state, schools that were sensitive to the needs of local communities and cost-effective without compromising on quality. Currently, there are 22,940 EGS centres functioning in Madhya Pradesh, accounting for nearly 42.8 per cent of all such centres in all of the DPEP states (Aggarwal 2000a).

This micro study of the Egarim panchayat takes a critical look at the DPEP initiative in Madhya Pradesh and its performance in tandem with the AS/EGS at the village level. It is primarily a qualitative study and focuses on the state sponsored primary education initiatives introduced in the Egarim panchayat in the last five years and its achievement of

UEE. It explores the local dynamics of gender, class and community participation that frame this achievement and highlights its implications for social and gender equity. Can statistics that highlight universal primary education actually reinforce qualitative and subtle manifestations of gender and social inequity? What is the redefined role of the state and community in the process of decentralisation? How do the attendant politics of caste, class and gender disrupt the notion and understanding of community? What are its consequences for a just social transformation? These are some of the broader questions that frame this micro study.

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY OF THE EGARIM PANCHAYAT

Betul is a southern district of Madhya Pradesh lying almost completely on the Satpura plateau at an elevation of 365 metres. The National Highway (NH 69) links Betul to the state capital and also traverses the district, flanked on either side by verdant teak and bamboo forests, rolling green fields and mountains. The climate is rather clement throughout the year; however, the district bears the brunt of the south-west monsoon between June and September, which incidentally coincided with our field visit. Historically, the area was an integral part of Malwa and subsequently the Mughal Empire throughout the medieval period, and consequently developed as an administrative unit under the Marathas and the British in colonial India. It has also been the seat of the Gond tribal kingdom of central India since time immemorial (Government of Madhya Pradesh 1971). This diverse history is very much evident today and is reflected in its socially distinct demography as well as in the different languages spoken.

The Egarim panchayat is located about 30 kilometres from the district headquarters and has a population of 2,281. It comprises two main villages, Egarim (2,090) and Jackaroo (168) as well as the hamlet Rapu (23), with Egarim being the largest as well as the most politically dominant village. These villages in turn are constituted of different wards, locally referred to as dhanas. Although the panchayat is located in an ST dominated district, the numerically dominant social group of the panchayat is the Kurmi (who belong to the category of OBCs), which constitutes 69.5 per cent of the population and primarily resides in the Kurmi mohalla or neighbourhood that spreads across three wards in Egarim (see Table 8.1). The other dominant social groups are the indigenous Gond and Korku, communities who are classified as STs, and are primarily contained within

Jackaroo and the Korku dhana of the Egarim village respectively. They constitute 18.5 per cent of the population. SC families constitute barely 12 per cent of the population and their households are mostly located in the SC mohalla, with a few in Jackaroo. The dhanas spatially reflect the social and economic differentiation and, to some extent, the segregation prevailing in the villages. A walk through the labyrinthine lanes of the different dhanas reinforces the initial impression that there is a direct correlation between economic and social status in the village. Outward trappings of prosperity like pucca houses, TV antennas, cattle, neighbourhood store and a general air of well-being are more evident in the Kurmi mohalla in contrast to the dilapidated kuccha huts of Korku dhana or the crowded quarters and squalor of the dalit mohalla.

TABLE 8.1
Egarim Panchayat: A demographic profile

Village name	OBC		SC		ST		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Egarim	752	689	197	180	11	7	1,836
Korkudhana*	42	48	3	5	75	81	254
Jackaroo	15	17	22	17	47	50	168
Rapu	10	13	—	—	—	—	23
Total	1,586(69.5%)		424(12%)		271(18.5%)		2,281

Note: * This is actually a dhana of Egarim. However, because of its social composition it is always referred to as a separate entity, thus intensifying the social distance between the Korku and the Kurmi community.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the local economy and most of the households are dependent on it for survival, either as cultivators or as agricultural labour. Cultivation is primarily of rain-fed kharif crops like wheat, paddy, maize and different varieties of indigenous coarse grains. According to the Kurmi community leaders, the late 1970s and the early 1980s also witnessed the advent of well and pump irrigation and the steady expansion of cultivation, including vegetable cultivation, as well as more land being devoted to cash crops, particularly soya bean. These developments were instrumental in introducing a certain level of prosperity in the Egarim village, especially among the landed households.

The Kurmi have traditionally been the cultivating caste and migrated to the district from north Malwa and Oudh over a century and a half ago on the grant of an estate to the ancestors of a proprietary family of Betul (Government of Madhya Pradesh 1971). The majority of the Kurmi

households thus constitute the landed class in the Egarim village, while most of the ST and SC households are landless (either their land is mortgaged or has been expropriated some time ago) and engage in agricultural labour. The daily wages paid for agricultural labour are rather low, barely amounting to Rs 35–40 for men and Rs 25–30 for women, and even this source of employment is not available throughout the year. Seasonal and, at times, long-term migration to Maharashtra and even within the state as agricultural and manual labour is a common survival response among the poor families. The poor households, especially among the ST community, are also partially dependent on the collection of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) like mahua, tendu leaves, and achar fruit during the year for survival. Another key strategy adopted by families during times of hardship is that of livestock rearing. Understandably, children also play a significant role in the organisation of household labour and livelihood strategies, and the nature of their contribution is very much contingent upon their age, gender and the overall need for labour in the family. However, during our field visit, we did not encounter or hear about any child in the 6–14 age-group who was actually working for cash.

Since the adoption of the 73rd Amendment, the panchayat has been transformed into a reserved seat for women belonging either to the ST or SC community in rotation. The current sarpanch is a woman belonging to the ST community who was elected to office in the last panchayat elections in 1998, replacing an SC woman candidate. Though the amendment may have formally transferred power to the socially marginal groups and women, this transfer is barely evident in the quotidian politics of village life. Men and women belonging to the SC and ST communities do have representation on paper in the various village committees, especially the VEC; however, their participation is nominal. The Kurmi community is the 'sociologically' dominant caste in the village and the real power still seems to rest with it, especially with the men. Despite protestations to the contrary and the absence of outward manifestations of ritualised social distancing among groups in their daily interaction (with the exception of the social and economic geography of the dhanas outlined earlier), these power dynamics were evident, albeit unspoken, in our informal conversations with the village people or the VEC meeting convened in our presence.

Conversation with local people reveals the high degree of community commitment and participation towards enhancing educational infrastructure in the panchayat. The panchayat currently has two GPS (one for boys and one for girls) in Egarim village, one AS in Jackaroo, one EGS

in Egarim, one co-ed middle school in Egarim and one high school in Egarim. The latter is a private school but actively supported by the larger community. The community also has two functional anganwadis and one Shishu Shiksha Kendra (SSK) for children between the ages of 3 and 6. Despite these obvious signs of community awareness, what one is struck by is the glaring lack of concern with other development issues like health, economic infrastructure development, poverty and employment opportunities. The village does have a Primary Healthcare Centre (PHC), but the building is in a state of disrepair and, mostly locked, since the current Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) does not live locally and is unable to open it regularly. This is no doubt a source of concern when the issue is raised but collective action has yet to be taken. There is also a private dispensary in the village; however, for emergencies one has to visit the adjoining village at a distance of 14 kilometres. The local EGS teacher attributes this state of affairs to lack of awareness and apathy among the people. According to him, despite the further decentralisation of power evident in the concept of 'gram swarajya' as an incentive for village development, 'Nothing ever gets done because in order to pass any scheme one requires a quorum which is currently fixed at 30 per cent of the population and which is never fulfilled, nor are efforts made to fill it through some kind of awareness campaign.' Some recent developmental schemes have been under drought relief, namely, canal repair at a nearby small dam in April 2001. Overall, the impression one is left with is that proactive educational initiatives apparently exist in some sort of a vacuum. They lack the dynamism necessary to forge connections with larger social concerns and this, we believe, has important implications for broader issues of gender and social equity and transformation.⁹

LOCAL DYNAMICS OF ACCESS, ENROLMENT AND RETENTION

The provisional results for the 2001 Census reveal that literacy rates for the Betul district indicate a 21 per cent increase in the last decade, which approximate the figures for the state (20 per cent) in general. Mr S.P. Srivastava, District Project Coordinator (DPC) of RGSM in Betul, highlighting the success of primary education initiatives in the district, commented that if the literacy rate were to be disaggregated by age, the figures for Betul would be much higher for the 6-14 years age-group. DPEP's District Gender Coordinator, Mrs Pachori, further added that as a result

of the Mahila Shiksha Abhiyan (1997–98) in the district, the GER of girls is currently as high as 99.8 per cent. The recent LSA 2000 indicates that the percentage of boys who are currently out of school is merely 5, while it is 7 for girls. The corresponding figures for these categories in LSA 1996 were 21 per cent and 26.5 per cent respectively, indicating a substantial decrease of nearly 15 per cent among boys and 20 per cent among girls. There is no doubt that a steady transformation has been taking place in primary education in Betul, where access to primary schools is no longer an issue, no school is without a building and community participation in furthering educational initiatives is very high, inspiring researchers to characterise the initiative as ‘primary education as a people’s movement’ (Vyasulu 2000: 145).

Egarim panchayat, too, has witnessed frenetic activity in the field of primary education and most of it has taken place post-1997. The most tangible manifestation of this is the opening of new schools. What is especially remarkable is that the panchayat also claims a near-total enrolment among school-going children between the ages of 6–14, and this claim was crosschecked through casual queries posed to teachers, parents and children as to whether they were aware of any child in this age-group who was not enrolled in school. Currently, 390 children (between the ages of 6 and 14) are enrolled in the different primary schools, out of which 52 per cent are girls (48 per cent are boys), 60.5 per cent are OBC, 21.5 per cent are SC, and 18 per cent belong to the ST category (these proportions seem fairly representative of the demography of the panchayat; see Table 8.2).

TABLE 8.2
Comparative overall enrolment figures for primary schools, Egarim

<i>School/Year Est.</i>	<i>OBC</i>		<i>ST</i>		<i>SC</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	
Boys’ primary school (1920s)	104	3	8	–	39	1	155
Girls’ primary school (1998)	–	105	–	6	–	36	147
EGS (1998)	6	13	18	14	–	–	51
AS (1997)	1	5	11	16	2	2	37
Total	111	126	37	36	41	39	390

The rest of this section explores this process of educational change and highlights the contributing factors that have enabled the transformation to occur. But before we proceed further, we need to point out that male literacy among the dominant Kurmi community has a long

history in the panchayat, and community leaders today proudly claim that 90–95 per cent of its male population is literate. The malaise of low enrolment and retention was/is thus primarily limited to girls and children belonging to the ST and SC community and hence is the focus of the study.

ACCESS AND ENROLMENT

The rapid expansion of primary educational facilities in the last five years is no doubt spearheading the assault on access and low enrolment that earlier characterised the panchayat. The main features of the different schools currently functioning in the village are:

- The original GPS was established during the early decades of the last century and maintains some of its original records from the mid-1930s. It is a large but haphazard pucca structure that has grown with the school. It is the only school that has the privilege of having individual rooms for all of its classes (I to V) as well as an equal number of teachers. The most recent additions have been a room for class V (built with DPEP funding) and a community-sponsored room, which houses a library and acts as the office of the Jan Shiksha Kendra (CRC). The school has a total population of 155 students, of which 67 per cent are OBC and 25 per cent are SC, and currently has four girls studying in class V on account of them being detained from the previous batch (when there was no class V instituted in the girls' school).
- The growing enrolment of girls from OBC families made the solitary GPS rather crowded and strapped for resources and space in the early 1990s. This galvanised the community elders and the VEC to solicit for a separate girls' school, which came into being in 1998 under the aegis of RGSM (see Box 8.1). Its total enrolment is 147, of which 71.5 per cent are OBC, 24.5 per cent are SC and the rest are ST. The very presence of a segregated school only for girls has been a powerful factor in the quest for total enrolment among the school-going girls' population in the village.
- The opening of AS in Jackaroo has contributed towards increasing enrolment in the Gond community. Currently, 37 boys and girls are enrolled in the AS, of which 73 per cent are STs, 16 per cent are OBC and 11 per cent are SC. The AS has been especially

Box 8.1

EGS: The new social contract

The EGS is located in the ST dominated dhana of Egarim and primarily caters to children belonging to Korku families. It currently operates from a single rented room which is little more than an enclosed veranda. The dhana is geographically located on the periphery of the village and it is fair to say that geographical distance is also reflective of social distance in this context. According to the EGS Guruji, a young man from the OBC community, before the creation of EGS only 25 to 30 per cent of school-going children in the dhana actually attended the village primary school, a consequence of the distance from the primary school and also their lack of confidence. However, the presence of an EGS has allowed Korku children and their families to steadily move from the margins to the centre and assert their right to seek an education. The school intends to move into its new pucca two-room premises in the neighbourhood by the end of August 2001. The construction cost of the building is Rs 60,000, of which Rs 50,000 is provided by the state while the local community, along with the land that is also a donation, has provided the rest.

Despite the rather dismal state of the current classroom, efforts have not been spared to make it cheery by putting up colourful drawings and learning charts on the mud walls. The seating arrangements in the classroom are very democratic and all children, girls and boys (irrespective of community), sit on the floor along with their Guruji in groups divided on the basis of their class and ability. The children usually get their own mats to sit on. The room is rather crowded with about 27 to 30 students cramped into it (the rest were absent on that day and it was not hard to conjure up a vision of the cramped room if all 51 students had turned up). It was a far cry from the orderly rows of the GPS, yet the process of learning was going on. The presence of one teacher and the different levels of students' learning requirements meant that students were often left to their own devices for extended periods of time. However, I observed that, interestingly, several motivated children were taking advantage of this non-attention and engaging in some sort of peer learning, although there were some who were busy talking or just sitting idly. The medium of instruction is Hindi and despite the fact that the majority of the children are Korku, this is not a problem. Most children speak some variation of Hindi at home, a consequence as well as a creation of/for the assimilation of Korku in mainstream society. Children as well as parents in the dhana distanced themselves from their own language and emphasised the importance of Hindi in today's world.

The unique feature about the EGS, apart from the process of its creation, is the community participation involved in the identification and selection

of the local Guruji to instruct the students. The objective behind it is to tackle the malaise of chronic absenteeism and also create congenial structures for community control and teacher accountability. This process has further reinforced community involvement and fostered a sense of 'ownership' that has been critical for universalising education. This was very evident to us when we went wandering through the lanes of the dhana, having informal conversations with parents and children regarding their impressions of the school. Despite not belonging to the Korku community, the Guruji's efforts and commitment to education were greatly admired and appreciated. However, there were also voices of dissent, where parents felt that the EGS was not at par with the GPS in terms of its facilities and maintenance. Some felt that, despite having a capable and well-liked instructor, it was not enough to impart a good education to their children.

effective in reaching out to migrant families and poor households living in Jackaroo and providing a congenial space to return for older children.¹⁰

- The EGS is located in the ST dominated dhana and primarily caters to children belonging to Korku families (see Box 8.1). With the exception of a few, the majority of students enrolled are those who have never been enrolled. Currently, out of the 51 students enrolled in the school, 63 per cent are ST and the remaining 37 per cent belong to OBC households.

It is not merely the opening of schools that has had an impact on enrolment; the condition of the school and its facilities are also great motivators and cannot be ignored. A brief review (see Table 8.3) indicates that all schools are either currently housed in pucca structures or will be moving shortly to their own premises, as in the case of the EGS. Further, all the schools are equipped with basic amenities like drinking water, toilets, basic school supplies (like blackboards, chalk, etc.), although the quality and proximity of these facilities may differ across schools. However, all schools, with the exception of the boys' GPS, are to some extent cramped for space and staff, and thus face the inevitable tensions and complications of multi-grade teaching.

The state also provides monetary support in the form of contingency funds (Rs 2,000 per annum to each school) for school improvement and an additional grant of Rs 500 per teacher to develop TLM. Though this aid has been given regularly since the inception of the schools, it has not

TABLE 8.3
Overview of school facilities as on 12 August 2001

	GPS (Boys)	GPS (Girls)	E G S		AS
			Current	New*	
Building structure	Pucca	Pucca	Kuccha	Pucca	Pucca
No. of classes	I-V	I-V	I-IV		I-V
No. of rooms	5	2	1	2	2
Co-educational	No	No	Yes		Yes
No. of teachers	5	2	1		2
Multi-grade teaching	No	Yes	Yes		Yes
Teacher-pupil Ratio	1:31	1:74	1:51		1:14
Basic TLM	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Midday meal	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Midday meal asst.	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Library	Yes	No	No		Yes
Drinking water	Yes	Yes**	Yes**	Yes	Yes
Toilets	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Playground	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

Notes: * The EGS is supposed to move into its new pucca building this August.

** Both the GPS for girls as well as the EGS have access to the village hand pump located at a distance of 200 metres from their respective schools. The girls' school shares it with the middle school and is more inconvenient as it means wading through the stream every time one needs to get water. The new EGS building is right opposite the hand pump.

been sanctioned for this academic year. The AS/EGS teachers are feeling the pinch more acutely, as they often used the contingency funds to purchase notebooks and pencils for the schoolchildren as most are unable to provide for themselves. Certain incentives like free textbooks are also given to students, irrespective of caste/community, in the EGS and AS and the supply of the books is fairly regular. ST and SC children attending the GPS are also given free books; however, this is through the book-bank scheme of the state government (not DPEP) and apparently the service is rather erratic. For the past four years, Eklavya has provided textbooks for all students in the GPS since its teaching package was being taught in the classroom. All the schools surveyed reported a regular supply of funds and provisions for the midday meal as well as the presence of an assistant to cook the porridge. Utensils for cooking had either been provided by the community or the panchayat and, although all children were encouraged to bring their own dishes, some dishes were kept at hand for poor children or for those who had forgotten to carry their dishes to school.¹¹

TABLE 8.4
Teachers' profile, by school, gender and community

School	No. of Teachers						Total/ Community
	Teachers		Shiksha Karmi		Guruji		
	(Rs 6,050 pm)		(Rs 2,265 pm)		(Rs 1,000 pm)		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Boys' GPS	3	–	2	–	–	–	5/OBC
Girls' GPS	–	–	–	2	–	–	2/ST & OBC
EGS	–	–	–	–	1	–	1/OBC
AS	–	–	–	–	1	1	2/ST

Source: Fieldnotes of Aarti Saihjee, August 2001.

Certain institutionalised monitoring systems have also been initiated by the state, such as the regular maintenance of the Village Education Register (VER). It is a document that takes note of every household and school-going child so as to be able to track the performance of each child and engage in cohort monitoring as well as report on the status of education in general. The VER was readily available at the panchayat for our perusal. The Jan Shiksha Kendra or CRC has also been created to act as a localised administrative and monitoring agency to supervise primary education facilities and SSKs across 10 to 15 villages and is located in Egarim. The current CRC coordinator, a former primary school teacher, is very active in providing academic support. He arranges monthly meetings with all teachers to discuss school concerns as well as activities relating to TLM, co-curricular activities and minimum learning levels. He also visits and monitors the various schools on a monthly basis to ensure that all teachers have access to him. The centre also publishes its own quarterly newsletter, which is distributed among the teachers to disseminate information regarding educational initiatives in the cluster area. The DPEP initiative has also institutionalised the VEC for the formal primary schools and the SMC for the EGS/AS to interface between the community and the schools in the panchayat.

ENROLMENT AND ATTENDANCE

Apart from physical access to schools, teachers at the different schools have also played the role of a catalyst in sometimes creating and often reinforcing the desire of parents to educate their children; either through their powers of persuasion or as role models (intentionally or

unintentionally). The EGS Guruji's first task after the school started was to conduct a door-to-door survey personally to convince families to send their children to school. His strategy was to explain to parents the 'legal' consequences of not sending the children to school, especially when access to a school had been made available by the government. According to him, the small size of the community has made it possible to maintain personal contact with families and further, 'the school location, right in the middle of the residential area, also it makes it difficult for parents to let their children miss school on a mere whim.... It is hard for a child to stay back at home when she knows that her playmates are in school.'

Similarly, school teachers at the boys' school, who belong to the village and are familiar with the families, their histories as well as economic conditions, used the information to keep control over children's attendance. However, the main handicap teachers face in the girls' school is that they do not belong to the village and this was evident in their lack of familiarity with their students' families. According to one of the teachers at the girls' school, 'As it is we are already short-staffed (two teachers between 145 students) and are located away from the residential area. So one does not really get the time to actually work on improving our outreach in the village.' She personally spends two or three hours daily on commuting to work and back, which involves a taxi and walking or cycling in dry weather. Teachers, especially those teaching in the AS/EGS, also contribute to increasing social awareness regarding education (and therefore indirectly to enrolment) by acting as animators and motivators in the adult literacy drive in the village.

In order for enrolment to be an effective indicator of universalisation of education, it needs to be accompanied by regular attendance. Discontinuous and erratic education may not be equivalent to dropping out, but in the long run may have similar results—poor intellectual abilities and skills, possibility of retention in the same class and maybe dropping out of school. Most of the teachers we spoke to attributed irregular attendance by children to a variety of factors, including sickness, looking after siblings and domestic duties (more in the case of girls), grazing cattle (in the case of boys), collection of MFP in the case of children of ST and poor families, alcoholism in poor families, accompanying parents on trips to visit families and relatives, and given the agriculture-based economy of the village, the seasonal demands on their labour. Local informants told us that even when children do not work in the fields, they often accompany their parents during the harvest season, as the fields are at a considerable distance

from the village and parents do not like to leave their children unsupervised. The rainy season also witnesses irregular attendance, as parents are not comfortable with sending children to school on a wet day. This is more acute for schools located at a distance from habitations as opposed to the EGS, which is right in the middle of the dhana. We randomly observed during the week we were there (it coincided with the rains) that on an average, in any given class, the number of absentees were anywhere between 25 per cent and 40 per cent. According to some teachers, there is a clearly discernible trend with regard to regular and irregular children. It is usually children from poor families (often used as a proxy to refer to socially marginal groups), and especially girls, who tend to be more irregular in their attendance. Regular students tend to be from relatively well-off families or from the salaried class. Further, the teachers at the girls' school also believed that girls with educated mothers, who realise the importance of education, were more careful about their attendance.¹²

The AS option of allowing children to attend school whenever possible has been successful, to some extent, in making the school an integral part of the children's routine and at the same time allowing them to engage in household activities. Teachers also offer flexibility to girls by letting them bring their younger siblings to school rather than missing out on school completely. I observed that girls who are attending EGS/AS exercise this option more often than those who are in the formal GPS. One reason for this may be the fact that the orderly and disciplined rows (hence strict environment) of the GPS do not lend themselves to such a practice, while the informal seating arrangement of the former helps to create a comfort zone for the student as well as her sibling. It was quite common to observe toddlers in EGS/AS classrooms absorbed in drawing on slates or scraps of paper or, in other instances, creating chaos or commotion, forcing their sisters to excuse themselves from class. Another reason could be that since most girls attending the GPS are from the OBC community, they may not be burdened with childcare because their mothers stay at home as opposed to engaging in wage labour.

The presence of SSKs and anganwadis in Egarim has also contributed towards increasing enrolment and attendance of children.¹³ These centres were established in 1995 and 1996 respectively and, according to the current functionaries, have been instrumental in 'creating a space for pre-school exposure that prepares toddlers as well as their parents for the school routine rather than being presented with it as a fait accompli at age 6'. The SSK worker reported that often girls come by and drop off their younger siblings on their way to school, as these centres are located

in the vicinity of the girls' school. Currently, around 75 to 80 children are enrolled with the integrated anganwadi and SSK centre (we do not have figures for the other centre). The absence of such a centre in Jackaroo has meant that the burden of providing early exposure and training to children below the age of 6 years falls on the AS staff. According to Radha Korku, who teaches in the AS, four to six children below the age of 6 years currently attend AS without being formally enrolled in the school. Thus, in some cases, primary schooling can start much earlier and without formal enrolment.

Household work does not emerge as a significant cause of absenteeism among girls, although a majority of 8–11-year-olds in the different schools stated that they did participate in domestic chores on a daily basis.¹⁴ Before coming to school most of them routinely fill and store water, sweep the house, do the previous night's dishes and some even cook a meal before reaching school by 10 a.m. They usually repeat a similar routine when they get back from the school. Some boys, too, confessed to doing household chores; however the number was small and it was not rare to hear girls say that while they do the chores, their brothers are either 'playing or studying'.

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN SCHOOLS

Regular school attendance is not merely contingent on convincing parents and freeing up the child from work, but also on children's motivation to learn and stay in school. Thus, decisions to attend and be regular are not exclusively parental but also take into account children's wishes and inclination to do so, and often there may be conflict (Drèze and Kingdon 1999). Within this context it becomes necessary to focus on the school environment and the learning and motivating strategies adopted by teachers and their direct impact on student's development and attendance. The Egarim primary school system is currently using the integrated learning material package, which follows the class system and has been introduced in this academic year. Previously, the AS package with its flexible non-graded *shrankhla* system was used in the AS and EGS, while the Eklavya package, with its emphasis on the spirit of inquiry, learning by observation and learning by doing, was taught in the formal primary schools in Rupahs Block (see Box 8.2).

Classroom observations in different schools reveal differences in the process of teaching and learning in the schools. The classrooms in the GPSs tend to appear more orderly and disciplined, an impression fostered

Box 8.2

Inside the classroom

Mr Kumar of the boys' GPS is a native of Egarim and has been a teacher in his alma mater since 1983 after clearing his class XI board exams. He currently teaches and has been teaching class II children. His teaching career spans nearly two decades and has witnessed intensive exposure to new ways of learning and teaching. He wryly remarks that he 'is a veteran of innumerable training exercises depending on what was in vogue—organising lesson plans under Operation Blackboard, learning new ways of teaching through cut-outs and jigsaw puzzles under the Seekhna-Sikhana package, focusing on the 'joy of learning' through interactive games and exercises under the Eklavya package'. According to Mr Kumar, the main difference that has been evident over the years has been the steady movement towards a child-centred pedagogy as opposed to the earlier teacher-centred approach. He further adds, 'Eklavya training was most crucial in transforming the process for me because I was able to experience first-hand the power of innovative teaching since their training exercises actually made use of strategies which we were supposed to adopt in our classrooms.' These insights have been very crucial for Mr Kumar, as they have enabled him, in his own words, to 'eliminate a child's fear in the classroom and attract him sufficiently to remain in school'.

Observing Mr Kumar in the classroom is a delight. The room, although dimly lit, has woodland murals lovingly painted on the walls with inquisitive squirrels vying for space with ferocious tigers. The artist is apparently none other than Mr Kumar himself with help from cut-outs provided by the trainers during a training session. Teaching aids like the abacus and other loose beads lie scattered in the corner and children sit in rows facing each other. The lesson being taught was from the EVS text and is about the nation—its people, air, rivers, forests, etc.—taught through a lilting song. The enthusiasm of the children is evident in the pitch of their voices and is infectious, often prompting a mischievous child to attempt to drown out the voice of his neighbour and earning a quick verbal remonstration for his efforts.

The singing is merely the medium to impart a lesson that enables children to make a linkage between their own village and the concept of a nation through the delineation of the interim administrative units—panchayat, block, district, state and nation. The lesson proceeds to describe the forests, water and air and then goes on to making it relevant to their lives. This means identifying their functions within the local context—what grows in the neighbouring jungles, which animals live in the jungle, how does water sustain village life, what grows in the fields—different fruits and vegetables,

(Box 8.2 contd)

how is mud useful, etc. At the same time efforts were also made to reinforce the process of identification of letters of the alphabet through the use of picture cards. Children demonstrating the pitter-patter of falling rain through controlled finger tapping or breaking into song often broke the intensity of teaching. The whole lesson seemed to play itself out in a rather Socratic manner, where the teacher was merely the catalyst while the students were active agents and ultimately the 'creators' of knowledge. The absorption of the students was complete and their enjoyment was tangible. Mr Kumar is definitely a teacher who has internalised the message of the 'joy of learning'.

by the rigid rows in which the children have been instructed to sit on the floor and reinforced by the hierarchical ordering of the room, with the teacher's table and chair (the only pieces of furniture in the room, at times accompanied by a storage trunk) occupying the space of authority. In contrast, the EGS and AS classrooms seem more democratic and come across as being in a perpetual state of flux, an impression aided by the fact that there is no furniture to restrict movement or establish authority. Girls and boys sit together in small circles (a far cry from the gender-segregated classrooms of the GPS) and the teachers are literally on their feet, flitting from group to group and maintaining personal contact with the children. One might be excused for sometimes being sceptical about whether any learning can actually take place within such a context; however, in reality, learning does happen.

All schools, with the exception of the boys' GPS, have multi-grade teaching. Teachers found this time-consuming and difficult because 'however hard one tries one cannot really keep students from being distracted by the other class/group'. However, we observed that the EGS/AS teachers seemed to somehow handle the pressures of catering to children with different needs in a more or less organised manner. The children, too, were more comfortable pursuing their tasks in consultation with each other as opposed to being monitored by the teacher. This can probably be attributed to the teachers' training and experience in implementing the AS package, which lends itself to multi-grade teaching through its shrankhla system (see Box 8.3). The children's ability to keep themselves engaged is also possibly a function of the group dynamics created in class, whereby mixed groups of children with different abilities often provide the incentive and space for facilitating what can only be termed as peer

learning. We were consistently surprised in both the EGS and AS classrooms to observe how students took charge in assisting their peers in either solving a mathematical problem or teaching them to spell correctly.

Box 8.3

Radha Korku: A profile in motivation

Radha is a teacher at the AS in Jackaroo. She is around 30 years old and has been teaching at the AS since its inception in 1997. In fact, in the first year, she operated the school from her own home before moving the school in 1998 to its current premises. Radha belongs to the Gond community and is a widow with two children. She sees her becoming a teacher as purely coincidental since she happened to be the only educated and qualified woman (she has passed her class XII from her natal village) in the village when the initiative to open an AS was undertaken. Further, she had recently become a widow and needed the economic support the salary of a teacher could provide and was actively supported by her in-laws as well as the larger community. However, what started as a mere coincidence has become a social crusade with Radha. There is a distinct note of accomplishment in her soft voice when she talks about the fact that no child between the age of 6–14 in Jackaroo is out of school or how children from AS are performing brilliantly in the Egarim middle school.

Till date, Radha has been teaching classes IV and V and helping out with the other classes. Starting from this year, she has started teaching the junior classes as she feels that it is a more challenging experience. Her confidence in her ability to teach has been strengthened through her exposure to the various training sessions organised by the state, at the state, district and block levels. These training sessions have helped her to develop a more activity- and child-centred pedagogy through the effective use of TLM as a means of communication. Although she says that the content of the AS package was completely different from what she had been exposed to during her school years, she was attracted to its 'new' style of teaching, which made learning 'fun' for students as well as the teachers. Having young children of her own, she was also quick to realise the short attention span of children and their need to be constantly stimulated. She takes an active interest in making TLM and also gets her students to help her in making them and then actually using them in the classroom.

She is extremely proactive about tracking the performance of students and at the first sign of trouble, mostly increasing absenteeism, contacts the guardian to find out the reason, even if this means, as in the case of temporary workers, visiting them at their work sites and convincing them to return.

(Box 8.3 contd)

The few children who drop out are usually girls who are 14 or 15 years old and who feel embarrassed about learning with children younger than them in school. As a voluntary initiative, Radha is tutoring two such girls in the village in the evening. Given that the village lacks a pre-school centre, Radha also encourages families to send their 4–6-year-olds so that they can get some early exposure to learning, even if it means increasing her own workload. The social homogeneity of the village, its small population and community support provide a congenial space for her constant efforts. With the current shift to integrated learning material and the class structure of the formal primary school from the earlier AS package, Radha is concerned whether the inflexibility of the new structure in terms of time, would harm the process of learning for young children.

TLM is a word often used by everybody and anybody who is in contact with the primary education initiative in the village. Some teachers complained about the recent cessation of the TLM and contingency funds, while others identified the TLM they used in their teaching such as word cards, number cards, pebbles, etc. Yet, it was difficult to actually observe a classroom where students and teacher alike were attempting to relate to a TLM in creative ways.¹⁵ We got an opportunity to observe classes IV and V in the girls' GPS: it was a joint class and the subject under consideration was maths. The children were being taught the concepts of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division through a revision exercise of a class assignment given the previous day. The primary teaching aids being used by the teacher were the blackboard and chalk. She called upon the children, at times collectively and at times individually, for answers and filled their responses on the board. The answers were then erased from the board, new problems written and children asked to do the exercise in their notebooks. The teaching was rather humdrum and very traditional in its orientation, giving children no space to actively participate in the process. Further, the teacher was unsuccessful in making her students grasp the concept of carry-over in an innovative manner. In our conversation she revealed that she uses TLM like shells, beads, etc. to talk about proportion and fractions; however, there was no evidence of this in the classroom. The only visible TLM was the ubiquitous charts and drawings that hung on the walls.

The AS classroom, that we observed, illustrated to some extent the creative and constructive use of TLM. Name cards were being used to

aid in the identification of students as well as the letters of the alphabet used (this was also evident in the junior classes of the girls' GPS). A group of children was also busy learning to count with coloured mud beads, made by the previous batch of students, as well as twigs collected by the children themselves. The local teacher had also created an innovative, clock-like rotational device to illustrate the matching of the Hindi *matra* for language development. The TLMs were actually stored in open shelves in the classroom and hence were easily accessible to the teachers as well as the students. Similarly, Mr Kumar's classroom (class II) in the boys' school was an absolute delight, truly epitomising the phrase 'joy of learning' (see Box 8.2).

Most of the children, at least those who were confident and vocal enough to respond to our questions, were understandably in favour of activity-centred learning or strategies. According to Rahul, 'I like coming to school because I get to play even in the classroom. Last week we played a game called "shop-shop" where we learnt how to count money.' Similarly, Lata likes the fact that, as part of her homework she gets to spend time in the forest collecting different coloured leaves. Other students seek individual validation for their efforts, like Sita who is keen on being selected by the teacher to write on the blackboard or be called upon to answer a question in class. Children seem definitely interested to come to the school, as is evident by the fact that they often turn up early when they see their teacher arriving, especially in the EGS and the girls' GPS.

The shift from teacher-centred to child-centred pedagogy has had a positive effect on classroom interactions and retention. All teachers interviewed had undergone some training, some more than the others, to make this crucial transition. Teachers are expected to participate in annual trainings and refresher courses to re-learn techniques of teaching old and new education packages; however, this training was not conducted in the previous year. Most of the AS/EGS teachers were more open to new methods and experiments.

A voice of caution is needed here as we need to realise the limitations of training and its ability to transform, almost overnight, a lifelong learning relating to the traditional pedagogy of teaching. However useful these training interludes are, they cannot be viewed as a one-time solution. They are primarily what the EGS Guruji termed as 'good refresher courses to review strategies as to what works and what does not'. In one way or the other, the new teaching methods encouraged by DPEP, even if half-heartedly deployed in some cases, *have* made a difference in motivating

Box 8.4

Review of primary education packages operational in Egarim

The classroom and the curriculum play an active part in motivating children to remain in school. One of the unique features of DPEP in Madhya Pradesh is its pioneer status in actively collaborating with and allowing NGOs to intervene in school education and giving them the freedom to innovate and develop activity-based teaching packages to move beyond text-based teaching as well as train teachers in teaching these packages. In Madhya Pradesh, in the last couple of years, three learning packages—Seekhna-Sikhana (SS), Digantar (AS) and Eklavya—were operational across the schools in the state. The SS package was being used in formal schools and EGS while the AS package was being used in AS. The Eklavya package was being used selectively in formal schools in certain districts, Betul being one of the selected districts. With the merging of AS and EGS, the AS package became the chosen package for these schools. Till last year the Eklavya and AS packages were operational in the GPS and EGS/AS schools respectively in Betul.

A recent study by the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad (2000) on the Eklavya and AS packages is very revealing of their strengths in the classroom. Some of their features are highlighted below:

- The AS package is based on the creation of a flexible non-graded primary school curriculum, which is divided into shrankhla or 'semester-stages' 1–8/10 which correspond to classes I–IV/V of primary schooling. The pace is determined by the learning ability of the child and allows him/her to move according to his/her ability to grasp different competencies in different subjects rather than being promoted without any assessment or else being detained in all subjects in class for inadequacies in particular skills only. This relieves teachers and students alike from the pressure of completing pre-determined units of the syllabus in a regularised manner, thus reducing the stigma of failure from exams.
- Eklavya's primary strength lies in the area of integrating fun into learning and the development of the capacity to think fearlessly, creatively, imaginatively, critically and analytically. Eklavya textbooks and activities make the link between the school and the local, and sensitivity to gender and social factors. These textbooks are written in a lively and easy-to-read manner with the use of words/subjects, which are very close to the day-to-day reality of the children. Topics alternate between a simple maths lesson and text for language development and EVS.

Since this academic year, the curriculum has been universalised across the schools in the state, Egaram included, through the introduction of an integrated learning material that is a synthesis of all the three packages used. The shift was made based on reported difficulties in classroom transactions, preferences of the teachers and parents who desired a formal demonstration of their children's abilities in language and numeracy as opposed to what was viewed as a 'playing-jumping and singing-dancing routine'. However, it is too early to comment on the impact, if any, this shift has had in the classroom.

both teachers and children alike (see Chapter 6). On the flip side, however, the classroom transactions are also indicative of the limitations of cosmetic changes in pedagogical skills. While children's ability to learn songs and poems is admirable, their basic skills in alphabet/number identification and writing definitely require a lot more effort. According to the Eklavya tutors working at the block level, 'this is symptomatic of children's inability to grasp all concepts, which in turn is a consequence of overcrowding and multi-grade teaching'. A fall-out of this has been the emerging consensus among both teachers and parents (revealed through informal conversations) that experimenting with new techniques of teaching, those that called for 'fun and play, singing and dancing' were all 'very nice for younger children; however, as children grew older they needed more discipline and traditional teaching methods to learn'. The power of such thinking is evident in the fact that the 'new' pedagogy was more evident in junior classes and AS/EGS classrooms as opposed to senior classes and the formal primary schools, and in the recent introduction of integrated learning material across the state that has sought to synthesise the different ways of learning embodied in the earlier packages.¹⁶

The AS/EGS curriculum till date has not imposed a time-bound promotion plan but provided space for the child to set the pace; it has also given teachers the flexibility to retain children at the lower levels until they are ready for the higher levels. This is in contrast to the GPS, where promotion in the first two years is usually based on attendance requirements irrespective of whether the child is learning or not. Our cohort analysis, though, indicates an extremely high retention rate in these years but this can probably be explained by the fact that underage children are often enrolled in schools to boost enrolment (see Chapters 2

and 3). After class II, students are monitored by quarterly evaluations and classified as 'slow learners', 'average' or 'bright' according to their performance. Teachers seem to be aware of the fact that different children have different learning needs and all agree that a small class no doubt makes for more committed teaching and learning. Shalini, the senior class teacher at the girls' GPS, has not observed any learning pattern particularly discernible for girls, i.e., specific to caste/community. However, she felt that children who have been exposed to pre-school concepts at the SSK and anganwadi centres are definitely quicker in grasping new concepts and also more articulate in the classroom.

Mr Kumar at the boys' GPS felt that ST students still require more attention in order to ensure their retention in school. He said, 'Although students' performance cannot be explained primarily on the basis of their caste, class and gender identity as it is ultimately dependent on the amount of effort put in, I still observe that ST children are weaker than the OBC and SC, while the latter two often compete with each other in the boys' GPS.' He further added that girls are academically weaker than boys but that they have been catching up in the last couple of years. ST girls are the weakest, as they often have to work at home; in addition, they do not have a supportive home environment. However, the EGS Guruji claimed that his experience shows that, 'Given the opportunity, ST girls are good in studies, more regular with their work, and also take more pride in their work than boys. This is despite the fact that some children of ST families are not able to attend school regularly and also do not have a supportive atmosphere at home because of poverty.' The AS/EGS teachers were fairly unanimous in their approval of the AS package and felt that it was particularly beneficial for girls belonging to the marginal social groups, as it gave them the flexibility which the formal school system lacked. The success of these schools was further endorsed by a middle school teacher who strongly felt that the few children from AS who had recently joined the school exhibited a much higher grasping power than the children coming from the GPS, even when the former were younger in age.

The recent shift in AS/EGS to the standard class system makes it imperative for us to consider the impact that this might have on the morale of both students and teachers. One cannot help but wonder, given the flexibility that has been an integral part of the AS/EGS learning process, whether the transition will be accompanied by the cycle of performance anxiety, retention, repeating of classes and the inevitable dropouts that is supposed to define the standard class system.

What is startling about Egarim is that the primary schools can currently claim that there are virtually no dropouts. According to the senior teacher at the girls' GPS, who has been with the school since its inception, there have been no dropouts. The few children who have left the school have all taken a transfer certificate. This was reiterated by the boys' GPS teacher, according to whom, 'Since the LSA in 1996 and the subsequent campaign by the district administration to create awareness as well as open new EGS the dropout rate has also steadily fallen in the village.' However, he did qualify this claim by pointing out that the earlier tendency to drop out was more evident among the ST children. This trend is also borne out by the cohort analysis of students in the GPS and AS/EGS who are currently studying in class V over the last four years (see Tables 8.5 to 8.8). Tracing the trajectory of students since 1997-98 for the GPS reveals that there are a fair number of children who are detained in different classes on account of failing or being absent during exams, but there is no concrete evidence of children dropping out. Several students have actually availed of the transfer certificate; however, with the exception of the few students who have left the GPS to join the local EGS/AS, there is no way of cross-checking the assumption that all children who have left school are actually studying elsewhere. The cohort analysis for the GPS also shows that there is a much higher detention rate in the first two years of primary schooling, after which the cohort settles down (a trend observed in other studies also). Also, a higher detention rate (41 per cent) is evident among girls as opposed to boys (26 per cent) in the GPS cohort.

TABLE 8.5
Cohort analysis of class of 2001-02, Egarim
GPS—girls, Egarim (1997-98 to 2001-02)

Category	Status	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Total
SC	P	10	10	10	8	
	TC					
ST	D	1			2	3
	P	4	4	3	3	
	TC			1		1
OBC	D	3				3
	P	18	16	15	12	
	TC	1	1	1	2	5
	D	12	1		1	14
TS		49	32	30	28	26*
TRS		32	30	28	23	23**

TABLE 8.6
GPS—Boys, Egarim (1997-98 to 2001-02)

Category	Status	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Total
SC	P	10	8	8	8	
	TC		1			1
	D	1	1			2
ST	P	3	3	3	3	
	TC	1				1
	D	1				1
OBC	P	22	19	19	19	
	TC	3				3
	D	3	3			6
TS		44	35	30	30	14*
TRS		35	30	30	30	30**

TABLE 8.7
EGS, Korku dhana (1998-99 to 2001-02)

Category	Status	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Total
ST Boys	P	9	4	2	2	
	TC			1		1
	D		5	1		6
OBC Boys	P	2	1			
	TC			1		1
	D		1			1
ST Girls	P	13	6	5	5	
	TC					
	D		7	1		8
OBC Girls	P	4	4	4	4	
	TC					
	D					
TS		28	28	15	11	17*
TRS		28	15	11	11	17**

TABLE 8.8
AS, Jackaroo (1997-98 to 2001-02)

Category	Status	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	Vth	Total
ST Boys	P	2	1	1	1	1	
	AB	2	1		3 Ret		3
	DO	1					1
SC Boys	P	2	2	2	2	2	
	D	1					1
	DO						

(Table 8.8 contd)

(Table 8.8 contd)

Category	Status	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	Vth	Total
OBC Boys	P	1	1	1	1	1	
	AB	1			1 Ret		1
	DO						
ST Girls	P	6	3	3	3	2	
	AB	4			4 Ret		4
	DO	2	3				5
	TC	1					1
SC Girls	P						
	AB						
	DO	1					1
OBC Girls	P					2	
	AB	1			1 Ret	1	2
	DO						
TS		25	11	7	16	9	19*
TRS		16	10	7	16	8	18**

Notes: Key to Tables 8.5-8.8:

P—Promoted, TC—Transfer Certificate, D—Detained, AB—Absent (in the case of AS refers to children who are enrolled/attend but their attendance is marked by such long absences—amounting to dropout status), DO—Dropout, TS—Total Students, TRS—Total Retained Students (TC+D, i.e., students who have not been promoted to the next class).

* Represents the total number of students who have been detained or taken transfer.

** Total number of students retained in the current year from the initial cohort of 1997-98.

The cohort analysis of the entering students of AS presents a more complicated picture and actually records dropouts. The AS records reveal that six children dropped out in the second year of its functioning and another 10 could be classified as chronic absentees who might as well be termed dropouts. However, by 2001, nine of them had returned to AS, a consequence of the outreach generated probably by the LSA 2000. Among these statistics is Mina who is a dalit and who left school to get married at the age of 14 years. There is also Sukhiya who belongs to a migrant household and whose school trajectory has been punctuated by long absences. Though she has cleared her class V exam this year, she is not continuing her education.

Given the fact that there are no dropouts in primary school, the transition from primary to middle school becomes a crucial litmus test for local commitment to education and also for exposing social and gender biases if any. According to the middle school faculty, currently most students from the GPSs, both boys and girls, make the transition to the

middle school. Since the presence of EGS and AS have generated enrolment among the SC and ST community as opposed to substituting for the GPS, (although there are some instances of this), it will be interesting to see how the EGS/AS students make this transition. Out of the 25 students who entered the AS in 1997, nine students have already cleared their class V exams (five girls and four boys) and a few have also joined middle school this year. However, it would be premature to draw any conclusions from this as class IV has been introduced in the EGS this year and the AS has yet to complete its five years.

SCHOOLING AND FAMILY

The normative attitude that children should be attending school is pervasive in the village and during our fieldwork we were hard-pressed to find parents who did not believe in the promise of education, or children who were not keen to attend school. However, parents did have their own ideas regarding where they would like to send their children to study, if they had a choice. For instance, in Egarim, the majority of OBC (nearly 90 per cent) attended the GPS while the ST children attended the AS/EGS (81 per cent). Interestingly, among the OBC children attending AS/EGS, more OBC girls (18) than boys (seven) attend the AS/EGS, suggesting that OBC parents prefer to send their sons to GPS. Further, even among the ST community, families sent their sons to the GPS while the daughters attended EGS because of its proximity. The choice of school was primarily verbalised as a response to distance; however, further probing revealed that it was also influenced by the general perception that the GPSs are definitely superior to the EGS/AS.

TABLE 8.9
Who goes to which school: Community and school-wise break-up

	GPS	EGS	AS	Overall enrolment
OBC	89.4% (54.3%)	8% (4.87%)	2.5% (1.5%)	237 (60.7%)
ST	19.1% (3.5%)	43.8% (8.2%)	37% (6.9%)	73 (18.7%)
SC	95% (19.4%)	–	5% (1.0%)	80 (20.5%)

Note: *The per cent in the parentheses refers to inter-community break-up in enrolment as opposed to intra-community break-up, which is highlighted.

Despite education being the mantra of the village, the motivation for sending children to school varied across gender, class and community.

Notwithstanding the competitive enrolment of girls among the OBC, parental motivation to send girls to school was qualitatively different from that for boys. Education is viewed as a means for social mobility and boys were expected to go to school primarily to enhance their employment prospects and indirectly contribute to the economic enhancement of the household. Even landed families were in favour of boys' education since the economic base of households has diversified and there is no incentive to restrict male members to farming. Mohanlal, a cultivator, commented that, 'Education is essential for his [son's] personal growth as well as that of the family's. He is bright and intelligent and should try for a government job that will bring a steady income to the family. His elder brother did not study beyond high school and works on the land. He is free to choose.' The desire for a 'government job' was also evident among the SC families in the village.

Among ST households, the burning desire is to escape the 'insecurity of casual labour employment', though this desire is often tempered by their harsh economic reality which makes education only possible till 'one can afford it' as opposed to 'till he wants to study'. Families are enthusiastic about the fact that their children are attending primary school; however, they are realistic enough to realise that this is not enough to guarantee them escape from poverty. As Shukra Baba said, 'Look at me. I studied till class V. This has not stopped me from being a labourer and it will not stop my son from following in my footsteps.' Other parents have a more prosaic attitude towards the education of sons: 'School keeps him busy, he learns things and remains out of trouble.' Most importantly, however, it appears that educational outreach has been very successful in the area and parents send their children to school because, just like any other norm, it has become a norm to be followed.

In contrast but not surprisingly, OBC girls are educated so that they grow up to be 'good homemakers' and 'can adjust in a changing society'. The responses regarding the benefits of educating girls were focused mostly on their ability to write letters and manage the home. There is no doubt that the ultimate objective, although not verbalised, seems to be the enhancement of their marriage prospects. This clearly came across in a community elder's explanation for the need for girls' education in Egarim as a response to increasing male literacy in the Kurmi community. According to him, 'the idea to educate girls was initially met with resistance as families protested that they did not want their women employed. It was up to us to convince the village that education was not about employment. It was about managing homes, being polite and looking after children better.'

When mothers were asked whether they would like their daughters to seek employment, they often sought refuge in responses that did not quite question the status quo. 'If she [the daughter] wants to do a job then she should', or 'if she needs work then she should' were the most popular responses to our question, fostering the erroneous notion that adolescent girls have control over their lives. During these interactions, it was interesting to observe a young married woman contradict her mother. She stated that she was married at 18 after finishing middle school. However, she did not have a say in the matter (actually, this was the first time she had verbalised her feelings). She herself had not protested, as she knew that her parents would not allow her to go out of the village to study and she did not have any other alternatives to pursue.

Further, all mothers in a focus group discussion (initiated during a mothers-daughters fair) were unanimous regarding the need for a segregated school for girls. They were quick to point out that co-educational schools were 'harmful as they exposed the young girls to all sorts of risks.... Boys tend to curse a lot and also are more physical.... Girls are at risk in a mixed school.' These responses indicate that the presence of a segregated school has boosted girls' enrolment as it has reduced the 'social risks' associated with sending girls to school. Even the middle school, which happens to be co-educational, is segregated by gender whereby girls sit in one section while the boys sit in another. The only voices of dissent were of women schoolteachers, especially the AS teacher who felt that a co-educational school experience was essential for the holistic development of children. She also felt that one of the most significant contributions education could make in a girls' life, irrespective of whether she married or worked, was to make her 'fearless, not be afraid of the unknown'. Sadly, these sentiments were just a voice in the wilderness. It is not surprising, then, to find that though most OBC girls finish primary school, the dropout rate starts increasing from middle school onwards. According to a middle school teacher, most of the girls who drop out do so because they get married and those who do not, get married after finishing middle school. Marriage as the ultimate objective was further reinforced by the fact that it was unheard of to encourage a daughter-in-law to study in a regular school, though a private option might be considered feasible in certain circumstances.

These dynamics are not as evident among the ST community where girls' education is a practical need and considered necessary for her survival. Although marriage is considered important, it does not seem to be the defining factor in education. Some parents sent their daughters to

the EGS because of the proximity of the school and the fact that it did not interfere with her household responsibilities. One mother was very matter-of-fact when she said that, 'In school she will learn how to talk with people and count money, and these will be useful to her in her life. In the long run, it will not make much of a difference because whether she has been to school or not, she still has to slave in front of the hearth.'

Conversations with parents also reiterated the point that despite the desire for education, most parents did not express interest in the school or their child's performance beyond sending them to school. According to the teachers, parents rarely took the initiative to contact them unless the child was involved in a fight at school or the teachers had invited them to discuss certain issues like the child's poor performance in school. The parents often hesitate to approach the school since they do not feel qualified enough to ask questions. As an illiterate mother said, 'I don't even know how to read. How can I go marching to the Guruji and ask him what he has been teaching my son? I am happy with the Guruji. He is a good man and my son is happy going to school. What else do I need to be worried about?' Parental supervision of education is limited as most mothers are unable to help their children with homework. During our stroll in the various dhanas we often observed that it was the elder siblings, especially older sisters, who were helping their younger sisters and brothers to tackle their homework. However, the fact that she cannot help her daughters to do their homework does not stop Asha from making sure that they have enough time in the evenings to finish it by not burdening them with the responsibility of preparing the evening meal. Other children are not so lucky and have to fit their homework in between their daily chores.

Thus, the very act of sending a child to school on a regular basis requires effort on the part of parents as well as children (PROBE Report 1999). This effort can either be social, as is evident in the case of overcoming the risk factor in girls' education, or a matter of creating time, or an economic effort, as in the case of meeting the indirect costs of education. All students in the GPS have been receiving free books for the last four years from Eklavya, since it was the latter's education package that was being taught in the primary schools of the block. With the introduction of the new teaching package, non-SC/ST children are no longer entitled to free books; instead they are available in the open market. However, the SC/ST children who are entitled to free textbooks are yet to receive their copies for the current academic year since their delivery through the book-bank

has been delayed. Opinion seems to be divided on the consequences of discontinuing this facility.

Teachers in the GPS are confident of most families being able to cope with the additional cost of textbooks; those who cannot, teachers feel, will have to make hard decisions and identify their priorities. Similar sentiments were echoed in the OBC dominated dhanas where, according to one person, 'Purchasing the books will not be a problem as the need for education has been created. So in order to keep sending their children to school, families *will* buy the books.' Another woman said, 'this year has been the first year that we have had to buy books for our children and it has not been a hardship. We need to wait and see whether families can afford the costs year after year.' The SC mohalla respondents, where 95 per cent of school-going children attend the GPS, were more blunt. According to them, 'we cannot wait indefinitely for books to come to us. What is the child supposed to do in school till then? We will have to buy the books and if we cannot, then we will stop sending children to school.'

Families are cognisant of the fact that despite education being 'free', it is not really free. Most of them make an effort to set aside resources for their children's education, and women belonging to self-help groups (who are also from OBC families that are reasonably economically secure) have opened accounts in the names of their children, both boys and girls. Some teachers in the boys' GPS have taken the initiative to personally donate books to some needy families so as not to disrupt their children's education. However, these are individual solutions and do not address the larger issue. What will happen if students cannot afford books? Will there be resentment, given that the ST dominated AS/EGS still receive free textbooks? Will they just stop attending school or will the incentive of free books at the EGS and AS act as a magnet? If this happens, will this mean that we shall see a reorganisation of school composition on class as opposed to community lines? These questions remain unanswered.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community participation in advancing the cause of education in general is very high in the Egarim panchayat and manifests itself in several forms—through school committees, contributions for school maintenance and the general level of awareness regarding education. The most tangible evidence of this participation is that all schools in the village are housed in buildings that have been made possible by community contribution of land, portion of building costs and labour. Apart from this, there is also

no denying that the local VEC has emerged as the single most important structure at the community level for primary education under DPEP, in addition to being a major political player in the larger panchayat politics. The Egarim VEC has 27 members, of which 18 belong to the OBC, three to ST and six to the SC community. Of the 27 members, 11 form the core committee (one ST, two SC and eight OBC), while the rest, i.e., eight couples represent the parents (five OBC, two SC and one ST). Women comprise less than a third of the core committee. Given the local power structure as well as the demography of the village, it is not surprising that the VEC is largely representative of the Kurmi community which controls the GPS system. Interestingly, during our discussion with the VEC, it was not clear whether the 'community' that was being evoked was the Kurmi community or the larger village community.

There was conflicting opinion regarding how often the VEC convenes, with responses varying from monthly to alternate months or on a needs basis. However, all parties agreed that the last meeting was convened this past July to discuss issues relating to the beginning of the new session, viz., enrolment and attendance in order to ensure that all children returned to school after the summer vacations, repairs of the middle school and provision of seating mats for the same. These mats are financed by the VEC's floating fund, which comprises voluntary contributions by the villagers as well as the 'school fees'. The fees are not really official, but a strategy devised by the VEC to raise sufficient money for use in emergencies. According to one member, 'We needed money to start our school fund but we were not in favour of going door-to-door as we were not sure what reception we would get. So we decided to take an initial payment of Rs 15 or Rs 20 from parents when the child enters primary school and Rs 20 to Rs 25 when he leaves class V. This has become the core of our school fund.' The amount thus collected is banked and used to support the government schools in the village on a needs basis.

The VEC has also taken upon itself the tasks of supervising teachers' conduct and attendance, student attendance and ensuring the uninterrupted provision of the midday meal. It also helps out with teaching material as it feels that children should not lack in anything to do with their studies. It takes pains to ensure that every deserving child has access to books and that the lack of them does not hinder her education. The VEC also supports the Shiksha Protsahan Kendra (SPK), an Eklavya initiative to support first-generation learners by providing them a space, appointing a coordinator and contributing at least 50 per cent of the coordinator's salary. There were two SPK centres in Egarim, of which one

has closed down and the other is functioning in the OBC dhana. In Egarim, however, the focus has shifted from first-generation learners to broadly offering tutorial services to children/adults before and after school hours, and providing support where it is lacking at home due to illiteracy or lack of time. Given its physical location in the Kurmi dhana, we were curious about the profile of children who availed of the services offered by the SPK, but were unable to obtain any data on this.

Ever since its inception, the VEC has been active in pushing for girls' education. As mentioned earlier, this was primarily a fall-out of increasing male literacy. The fact that the VEC is also politically active is starkly evident in its ability to solicit permission and partial funds for the separate girls' GPS (Box 8.5). The VEC supports the idea of a separate girls' school and its current priority in its crusade for girls' education is to lobby for a middle and a high school for girls so that they 'can continue their studies unhampered. Boys can travel outside of the village but girls are not able to do so.' The more pressing and immediate concerns, though, are to garner funds for constructing a walkway over the river to the girls' school and to requisition for an additional teacher. In the interim, through negotiations with the district authorities, the VEC has managed to get one of the teachers in the boys' school to be temporarily assigned to the girls' GPS, since one of the teachers in the latter is pregnant and will soon be going on maternity leave.

Box 8.5

'We like coming to school!'

On a weekday morning at about 9.00 a.m., if you happen to be in the vicinity of the main approach road to Egarim as it meanders towards the village, you should not be surprised to see groups of chirpy young girls on the road, skipping and jumping their way to school. We say 'surprised' because school actually begins at 10.30 or 11.00 a.m. However, children can be seen congregating as early as 9.00 or 9.30 a.m. The attraction is the huge playground in front of their primary school, vast enough for them to play an energetic game of tag or a local variation of hopscotch and, if there are enough girls, kabaddi. Initially, these girls may have started coming to school to play but have consequently remained in school to learn.

The girl's primary school in Egarim is a testimonial to local motivation in seeking education for their daughters, an education that was denied to their mothers and wives. Mr Kumar, currently teaching in the boys' school,

is an alumnus of that very school and recalls that when he used to attend school in the early 1970s, only a very few girls belonging to well-off OBC families had just started attending school. This is unlike the current scenario, where all families seem keen on sending their daughters to school, a likely result of an educated male population, awareness raising campaigns, as well as simple peer pressure. The movement for a new girls' school was initiated by the VEC in the mid-1990s as a response to the inability of the existing primary school infrastructure, physical as well as economic, to cope with the increasing enrolment of girls in the village. The sanction for a new school has been obtained primarily through the political efforts of the VEC and a special intervention by the district MLA (who also happens to be the state minister for tribal development) under the aegis of the RGSM. Community participation in this venture was also crucial: a local family donated an acre of land (another .5 acre was later acquired by the school) for the school grounds as well as some construction material and labour for the school building.

Today the primary school, a three-room structure (two classrooms and one small office space), with an enclosed veranda and a paved front courtyard, stands in 1.5 acre of land. The school premises skirts the main approach road to the village and is located opposite the middle school. A small stream runs parallel to the road. The lack of a bridge across the stream makes the school a little difficult to access, especially during the rains when the flow of water is strong and the rocky bed is slippery. The VEC is currently negotiating to acquire funds to build a walkway over the stream.

Due to lack of space, classes I, II and III are taught in one room while the senior classes, IV and V, are taught in the other. The rooms are large and airy and have massive blackboards mounted on opposite walls. The children sit on the floor in orderly class-wise rows, while there is a desk and chair for the teacher. The younger children seemed more active, talkative and assertive in the classroom compared to older girls. The latter, in keeping with the traditional style of teaching, only responded when questioned. The teachers feel the lack of space acutely and are concerned regarding the effect it is having on children. Keeping the school neat and tidy is a chore performed with enthusiasm by children on a rotational basis and without any bias being exhibited on the basis of community.

There is no doubt that the presence of a girls' primary school has been a great incentive in convincing the most sceptical of parents to send their daughters to school. There is now even an initiative to campaign for an all-girls' middle school in the village. As for the children, when we asked them whether they would prefer to stay at home or come to the school, the verdict was unanimous—'We like coming to school.'

A VEC meeting was convened during our visit; however, all members did not turn up as they were otherwise busy. The only ST representative at the meeting was the sarpanch. This is fairly representative of low ST participation in committees elsewhere. Though the Korku community was very much aware of the fact that its representation in the VEC was inadequate, it was not overly concerned about it. The sarpanch was candid enough to say that she is frequently the solitary woman in most of the village committees. However, on that day, a couple of other women had also been persuaded to attend. The seating pattern was very indicative of the committee's power dynamics. The women sat in one corner with their heads covered and faces slightly averted so as not to violate the prevalent purdah norms.

The most vocal member happened to be the representative of the district MLA; the others rarely spoke. One teacher took advantage of the specially convened meeting to seek advice regarding a boy who had enrolled but was not attending school. The committee also took the opportunity to finalise plans for Independence Day celebrations. On the whole, the VEC is very pleased with the DPEP initiatives, the state support they have received and by the way their village has been transformed.

The SMCs of the EGS/AS pale in comparison to the importance given to, and clout exercised by, the VEC in the village since communities/committees vary in terms of educational, economic and political capabilities. Functioning along similar lines as the VEC, the SMC comprises nine members and meets every month to address the concerns of teachers and parents. The current preoccupation of the SMC is the hiring of an additional teacher for the EGS. According to the Guruji, the SMC also has a separate contingency fund, which is very small. He claimed that the people in the dhana are unable to contribute cash for the school and hence prefer to volunteer their labour. This was fine till the school building was being constructed; however, what is needed now is cash, especially since the contingency funds and TLM allowance have not been paid this year. As in the VEC, parents in the SMC are not very vocal. Their primary expectation seems to be that 'teachers should teach their children well'. According to the EGS Guruji, in the SMC, the OBC parents tend to be more vocal and articulate compared to ST parents. He is keen that parents play a more active role, especially fathers, as the male population in the village has a 95 per cent literacy rate. He is of the opinion that considerable progress in education has been made in the panchayat that is not visible in neighbouring villages. However, they cannot yet afford to rest on

their laurels because they need to 'sustain the transformation and hence generate state as well as local resources'.

UPE: IMPLICATIONS FOR GENDER AND SOCIAL EQUITY

This micro study has been like a dream come true. Instead of dismal statistics, we found ourselves transported to what Vyasulu (2000) has referred to as the 'wonderland of primary education' where schools have buildings; all children go to school irrespective of class, gender and community; teachers teach and children learn and all this is complemented by a high degree of parental motivation and community participation. In order to fully understand this transformation, our findings have to be located within the larger context of DPEP's performance in Madhya Pradesh and especially in Betul. First, the latter is one of the top performing districts in the state and is considered a 'Grade A' district, ranked second out of 26 DPEP-I districts in July 2000. The criteria for this ranking are based on compliance with DPEP's administrative norms, namely, utilisation of funds, civil works, physical progress, institutional reform, *padhna-badhna*, BRC, timely reporting, headstart procurement and training status and printing/distribution of textbooks (Kothari et al. 2000). Further, what is interesting is that Betul, before DPEP was initiated, was already identified as a high literacy district for females and middle-level district for males on the basis of the 1981 and 1991 Census (Acharya 2001), making it a favoured district for DPEP studies (this also probably explains the Madhya Pradesh government's insistence on its inclusion in this study). Second, the status of primary education in other parts of the state as well as districts where there is an ST population, is rather varied. Existing documentation reveals a more complex reality characterised by success, failure as well as social struggle (DPEP 1999a, Jha 2000, Kothari et al. 2000, Sharma 1999, Srivastava 2000). Third, the fact that the panchayat in question is OBC dominated and is located in an ST dominated district may also partially explain the sterling performance of the panchayat and has to be factored into our understanding of its success.¹⁷

The Egarim panchayat has to be viewed as an outlier rather than as truly representative of Madhya Pradesh. However, this is not to say that we cannot infer any lessons from its experience. On the contrary, as the study illustrates, Egarim can actually be used as a 'best practice' case study for aspiring villages. Further and more importantly, it also provides a perfect instance to explore the social and gender equity trade-offs that

might be implicated in the process of attaining universal primary education. The competing voices of parents, teachers, children and community elders highlighted in the preceding pages hint at the possibility that issues of gender and social equity have not completely vanished despite attainment of near universal primary education. Certain issues are instantly identifiable,¹⁸ primarily those relating to special education needs of children. According to the DPC, Betul, the gap observed in achieving total enrolment in the district in primary education reflects the failure to integrate disabled and handicapped children in the schools. Conversations with teachers reveal that they are unclear regarding what constitutes 'disability' among children. Efforts are underway in this regard by raising awareness through camps and targeting parents to move beyond the notions of 'shame' and 'stigma' and to proactively encourage disabled children to attend school. However, this is just the beginning.

Other issues of equity seem less identifiable instantly, having been rendered invisible by the dominant discourse of universal primary education as a goal in itself. Without detracting from Egarim's success, in this concluding section we attempt to move beyond the quantitative warp of equity indices put forth by DPEP¹⁹ and instead try to locate DPEP's initiatives to reduce gender and social equity at the micro level within the larger context of education and social transformation. This is not to say that the onus of a just social transformation rests solely with DPEP. This exercise is essential in understanding that although the content of the policy programme is no doubt an important factor in determining the outcome of any implementation initiative, what is equally critical is the social, economic and political context in which these programmes are implemented. It is the latter that imparts the local flavour, provides the impetus or at times may even constrain the initiatives, and has important consequences for the real lives of people. Before proceeding further, we need to qualify that this is merely an exploratory exercise and hence raises more questions than it answers.

If we have to identify the primary local factor behind Egarim's success story, it would be the forging of a social consensus and the transformation of primary education into a collective good that is desired by all. This has been made possible by democratising access to primary education through DPEP initiatives, opening of new schools under the EGS and by launching an effective educational outreach campaign that has effectively capitalised on the existing interest expressed by the local landed Kurmi community in education as being primarily a means of social mobility.²⁰ The presence of a cohesive single-caste/community settlement pattern within the

panchayat, in this context the Kurmi, has been instrumental in facilitating a smooth transformation. However, an outcome of this has been the accompanying new dynamics of social segregation between the social groups (specifically the OBCs and STs) regarding which school their children attend, with OBCs preferring the GPS (nearly 90 per cent) and the STs being concentrated in the EGS (81 per cent). This segregation is nothing new, as both Srivastava (2000) and Jha (2000) in their earlier studies of EGS/AS in Madhya Pradesh have documented, an overwhelming majority of marginalised groups (both boys and girls) attend the EGS/AS. And this would probably not be an issue if we were talking of the emergence of segregated schools in remote hamlets comprising homogeneous social groups. However, in this case we are talking of one village where the distance between the schools (GPS and EGS) as well as the dhanas in which they are located is probably less than a kilometre as the crow flies. The issue of segregated schools is further complicated by the presence of a separate girls' primary school, a consequence of the political negotiations by the Kurmi community, which not only reinforces the parallel school system in the village but also reflects the socio-cultural attitudes of the different social groups. The segregated GPSs mainly cater to the OBC community and allow for the education of Kurmi girls, while the co-educational classes of the EGS/AS are more reflective of the relaxed gender norms evident in tribal communities.

While these developments may have facilitated access to schools in the short run, we do not know what they augur for gender and social equity in the village in the long term. What are the implications of such segregation for our understanding of social equity? Is the mainstreaming of school segregation in our quest for UPE here to stay? All the micro studies in this volume highlight the existence of segregation between boys and girls, between communities attending separate schools (Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh), between caste groups attending private schools and government schools (Haryana and Karnataka), and between dalits and forward castes attending separate government schools (Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh). Does this mean that down the years we can anticipate another social struggle in rural India similar to that of school integration witnessed in USA?²¹ Certain other trade-offs also seem to be evident. The emergence of segregated schools may have succeeded in removing physical barriers to access, but social barriers still remain. In fact, some barriers seem to be strengthening in relation to gender and social inequalities.

Most teachers we spoke to (there being few exceptions) do not necessarily view the different learning needs of children as being an outcome of their social environment, i.e., a child may have different needs because he/she might be a first-generation learner. Rather, the emphasis is usually on the fact that they belong to a marginal community (SC and ST community in this case) and hence their slowness is viewed as being inevitable and often acceptable. This understanding is pernicious, as it renders social inequality as 'natural' and hence limits the extent and nature of intervention to mitigate the hierarchical status quo.²² It is therefore not surprising that the local community perceives the GPSs to be more superior to the EGS/AS with no concrete evidence to back this belief. We ourselves were unable to discern any significant difference between the abilities of children in different schools to corroborate this. Issues of social inequality, however, rarely figure within the context of classrooms, teacher-training sessions or even within the larger village community.

In the context of Egarim, we believe, it is all the more crucial to interrogate the dynamics of social inequalities since their manifestation is not very obvious. These inequalities are not made visible through denial of water to ST and SC children in the GPS, or segregated seating patterns in classrooms.²³ Rather, they emerge unconsciously in statements that children utter: 'Children who live in Korku dhana [the ST dominated area] are "donkeys".' Or through the banal reinforcement of categories like 'tribe' to denote backwardness without critically interrogating the historical and social processes implicated in the creation of a 'tribal' culture and its seeming opposition to mainstream society. It is not surprising, then, to hear teachers as well as ST students/parents locate their experiences in terms of conventional stereotyping, namely, 'Adivasis are not interested in education hence they are backward.' Identifying the political economy of 'backwardness' could actually generate a creative discussion that would force the community to place education within the larger socio-economic context of economic development, an issue currently ignored in Egarim where education as a desirable goal is being pursued within a social and economic vacuum.

Unlike social inequity, 'gender' as an issue for discussion and debate is widely prevalent; however, it seems to have been mainstreamed into a very domesticated avatar where it is synonymous with women and is primarily a descriptive category. For most teachers and community leaders, getting girls to enrol and attend school is primarily what the 'gender'

issue is all about. The opening of a 'girls only' primary school has encouraged the Kurmi community to educate their daughters and at the same time reduce the accompanying 'social risk' by maintaining control through segregated spaces, an essential ingredient for caste and social mobility. The lack of local employment for women and prevailing social strictures against employment seem to be leading to the instrumental use of education as a commodity in the marriage market. This is in contrast to the experiences of Himachal Pradesh, where increasing acceptance of women in the public sphere has further boosted enrolment rates (PROBE Report 1999). Jeffery and Jeffery (1998) doubt that education per se is good for women in terms of reducing gender inequality and argue about the need for changes in social structure as a necessary condition before education can have a desired effect on female autonomy. How else do we explain the fact that despite having a fairly sizeable population of women in Egarim who have graduated from middle and high school, there is no local female teacher teaching in the village? There are attempts in AS, EGS and the girls' GPS classrooms to actively address gender issues and focus on the gender division of labour as a springboard for discussion as it is a lived reality for most of the students. However, what is missing in the picture is the understanding that gender is not something that is taught; rather, it is practised (Kumar et al. 2001). Further, the presence of segregated schools has actually allowed 'gender' to completely disappear from the classrooms of the boys' school. There is no institutionalised interaction between the two schools, nor has any effort been made to converge activities where both boys and girls can participate. Thus, it is not surprising to hear that girls in the GPS refuse to sing and dance in the playground because 'boys are watching us'. We have no doubt that, despite its contribution to increasing enrolment of girls, having a segregated school, especially at the primary level, is actually a disservice to society in the long run.

A related issue that frames the concerns of gender and social equity is that of 'community' and 'participation'. Who constitutes the 'community'? What constitutes 'community participation'? Community and community participation have been central to DPEP discourse and are embodied primarily in the creation of VEC (also the MTA and PTA), which is envisaged as the key institution for community mobilisation, participation and empowerment. Community in the case of DPEP is an invention which 'presents the community itself as an instrument to be first devised and

then sharpened for a given purpose. This invented community, however, does not have the freedom of choice to either demand what it actually desires or not demand primary education as the invention is bound by a predestined purpose' (Kumar et al. 2001: 564). Such a definition ignores the attendant power structures within communities and the possibility of conflict over aspirations.

Similarly, Guijit and Kaul Shah (1998) insightfully argue that local contexts are complex, diverse and dynamic, and the mythical notion of community cohesion actually glosses over differences and divisions while privileging the voices of people who have more power. These dynamics are evident within the context of Egarim, where statutory reservation may have enabled marginal groups to find a place in village governance, but the socio-economic and political conditions of the village seem to have circumvented their contribution as well as their presence in the local power structures. Caste identity rather than the larger village society seems to be defining the meaning of community in Egarim, especially in the VEC. Resource-poor communities like the Korku and the Gond do not possess the infrastructure or clout to make their will prevail in the larger arena of the panchayat or in their negotiations with the state. This is evident in the fact that the Egarim village has three ECCE (two anganwadis and one SSK) while the neighbouring village Jackaroo in the same panchayat does not boast of even one. Instead of addressing the social and economic power relations that lie at the heart of educational inequalities, the process of decentralisation, under the guise of 'community participation', seems to be strengthening the extant social schisms of space, gender and community in the local context. Thus, in order for decentralisation to be effective, terms like community and community participation need to be critically associated with 'community action in order to increase the involvement of socially and economically marginalised people in decision-making over their own lives' (Ramachandran 2001: 2244-45). A process somewhat similar to the involvement of women belonging to the self-help groups in primary education initiatives in Rathnam's study of Tamil Nadu (see Chapter 13).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, there is no doubt that Madhya Pradesh has emerged as a forerunner in the field of educational innovation in the last decade and its success stories are multiplying by leaps and bounds. There is also

no denying that the Egarim panchayat adds yet another feather to the Madhya Pradesh government's cap. The panchayat bears witness to the power of the 'alphabet', political will as a prime mover of social change and reiterates the continuing need for localised educational planning. It ably documents the role a dynamic programme like DPEP can play in democratising education, if backed by a political consensus at the state level and a history of active collaboration with NGOs in the field of primary education. It is truly a 'best practice' study and can be held up as a beacon to generate a checklist of components essential to achieve universal primary education—actual decentralisation, innovative data-gathering and monitoring mechanisms (LSA, VER), educational innovations (EGS, teaching packages) and community involvement among others.

The study also goes beyond the success story to explore whether universal primary education is adequate, by itself, to address the twin objectives of gender and social equity in primary education. The exploration reveals that if DPEP initiatives are to genuinely serve the educational needs of those on the margins, then it is necessary to acknowledge that 'lack of education' is not an isolated phenomenon. It cannot be understood or responded to by divorcing it from the complex set of social, political and economic issues of which it is but one indicator. The mere provision of schools cannot suffice, nor will mere awareness campaigns be sufficient to facilitate a social transformation. As stated in the previous section, the context of implementation is as important as the content in defining the success or failure of policy initiatives. Thus, an effective demand for education will have to be contingent on the critical interrogation of issues of material and social deprivation. It will also have to question the inequalities between men and women and between social groups, which are deeply embedded in the social, economic and political realm and hence will require a coordinated inter-sectoral approach at all levels.

Having said this, we would again like to qualify that we do not view DPEP as the 'magic wand' which will single-handedly lay to rest the social ills that plague our society. Rather, we would like to underscore the need for DPEP to actively engage with the social dimensions of education, critical inquiry and the link between education and action to pursue the stated objectives of gender and social equity. For the immediate future, DPEP thus needs to create awareness and sensitise its monitoring mechanisms with regard to the intangible dimensions of gender and social equity and also highlight the agenda for the next stage of educational reforms, namely a focus on content and pedagogy.

NOTES

1. The field investigation for this study was carried out between 7–12 August in Betul district, Madhya Pradesh, by the principal author (Aarti Saihjee) and a local team comprising Dr Rahul Sharma and Mr Anil Dhiman, who are affiliated to Bal Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS), Bhopal. The author is grateful to BGVS, Bhopal for extending field support and the research team is very thankful to the RGSM, Bhopal, as well as the DPEP unit in Betul for their cooperation and gracious hospitality. The author can be reached at asaihjee@hotmail.com.
2. Apparently the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission (RGSM) has made this greeting a standard norm across the DPEP districts. Vyasulu (2000) also mentions in his study that local people in Betul refer to teachers as well as graduating students as 'akshar sainiks', i.e., 'alphabet warriors'.
3. With the exception of the district (Betul), all other administrative units that are the focus of this study have been assigned fictitious names to maintain anonymity for the purpose of this study. The same courtesy is also extended to the teachers, children and parents who were interviewed during the course of the study.
4. Most of the recent comparative data in popular circulation, both national and regional, on education reinforces this observation (NCAER 1999, PROBE Report 1999). Smaller studies acknowledge the fact that despite Madhya Pradesh's previous dismal performance, a social transformation is underway in primary education in the state, the catalyst being its innovative Education Guarantee Scheme.
5. The DPEP was established in 1993 by the Department of Education and was part of the social safety net package to combat the ostensible short-term costs of the structural adjustment programme. Its objectives are to increase enrolment, retention and quality in primary education by targeting investments primarily to districts with below-average female literacy rates and decentralising planning to districts so as to encourage popular participation. The programme has a special focus on girls and socially disadvantaged and backward groups (SC and ST). Its primary emphasis is on investments in the quality of primary instruction and improved school facilities. For details on DPEP see Aggarwal 2000, World Bank 1997. For a recent ideological critique of DPEP, see Kumar et al. 2001.
6. Under the AS programme of DPEP, the states have the freedom to design their own AS programme to provide primary level schooling to all children who are out of school. Other states have adopted strategies that vary from NFE centres and residential camps for older children in order to encourage them to complete their primary education and bridge courses for smaller children in the 6–8 age-group who are out of school to help them get back to the formal school (see Chapter 5).
7. For a detailed framework of EGS and the ensuing studies, debates, performance and evaluations in Madhya Pradesh, please refer to the Madhya Pradesh government publication *From Your School to Our School*, RGSM, 1999.
8. A fully functional school includes provision for a teacher, teacher-training, free TLM, operational contingencies and routine monitoring and evaluation.
9. Local informants indicate that Egarim village (excluding the Korku dhana) has merely 70 households that fall below the poverty line, a mere 18 per cent of the total population living. Could the relative affluence of the 'dominant caste' be the contributing

- factor to the general apathy being exhibited? This question is addressed briefly in the last section.
10. A recent development has been the re-classifying of all AS/EGS from this year onwards, thus doing away with the AS/EGS distinction. However, I have retained the classification of AS in this text to distinguish between schools in the local context.
 11. The rule is that only children having 80 per cent attendance will be entitled to the meal; however, the AS teacher said that 'in reality it is very hard to implement it as it becomes hard to explain to children why they have to go hungry while the other child gets to eat his share'.
 12. Drèze and Kingdon (1999) and Vaidyanathan and Nair (2001) observe inter-generational effects i.e., children of educated parents are more likely to go to school, where a boy's schooling is more responsive to the father's education and vice versa. Maternal education has a large positive effect on a daughter's chances of completing primary school.
 13. The PROBE Report (1999) also makes a similar assertion regarding the role played by these pre-school centres in increasing girls' enrolment in Himachal Pradesh.
 14. The PROBE Report (1999) indicates that the extra time for work among children who do not go to school, compared with those who are attending school, is 2.1 hours for boys and 2.2 hours for girls and is hardly enough to warrant not attending school to work. Housework may not be a cause of absenteeism but it may be worthwhile to explore if it has a differential impact on school performance.
 15. Shukla (2000) in his discussion on the role of TLM in primary education quotes from the reports of Joint Review Mission state teams in November 1999, which mentions that, 'Teachers are still not able to relate the TLM used to the learning desired, nor are they able to ensure that the TLM adopted presents an appropriate level and variety of challenge.... The emphasis on TLMs has also resulted in many schools being 'decorated' with materials that tend to remain on the walls than actually in children's hands' (pp. 20-32).
 16. Madan (see Chapter 6) discusses the fact that the backlash against the 'new' pedagogy is evident across the DPEP states. She writes, 'In several cases parents too were found to complain about the "Khel Kood" that their children engaged in rather than textbook-based traditional learning. There were also situations where parents felt that, as compared to the traditional method of learning by rote where a child seemed to know his math tables or the alphabet and could speak English at an early age, the indirect approach of the DPEP was a "waste of time" as children did more singing and dancing rather than written work.'
 17. Unlike other states covered in this research study, Madhya Pradesh was the only state where the state government did not permit the researchers to select the village but offered to select the panchayat themselves. We shared the criteria of selection with them—an ST majority village in an ST dominant block of Betul district. As this study was undertaken as a part of DPEP, we needed the permission of the concerned state governments for conducting the micro study. As a result, in Madhya Pradesh, we were left with a panchayat which could be documented as a 'best practice' and is not representative.
 18. Another issue of social and gender equity that is of great concern but missing in this narrative, is that of equity issues pertaining to teachers, their recruitment and salaries. These issues are of utmost importance as they have an impact on classroom processes

and children's educational attainment levels. However, lack of space constrains us from addressing the issue. For overview and details regarding teachers and DPEP, see Ramachandran (2001), Kumar et al. (2001), Sharma (1999), and DPEP (1999).

19. According to DPEP, gender equity is measured in terms of the share of girls enrolled in a given class/level as a per cent of their share in the total population and social equity in terms of the share of SC or ST enrolment in total enrolment as a per cent of their share in the total population (Aggarwal 2000a). Visaria (see Chapter 2) critiques the DPEP equity indices on three counts: (a) its inability to move beyond enrolment figures; (b) inability to throw light on the overall enrolment of girls or children belonging to the disadvantaged social groups and (c) the fact that it does not take into account the growing presence of private schools and hence may exaggerate the achievements of these marginal groups. She further argues for community-based studies, which are able to move beyond numbers and holistically try to capture all aspects of education as it gets played out in the contested arenas of the village, family, caste, class and community.
20. The Kurmis are a cultivating caste and a politically and economically strong community across Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Available research on the contested dynamics of education as a source of social mobility and the emergence of OBCs as a force in electoral politics also reveal the Kurmis to be one of the important players. As one of the teachers interviewed said, the reason why the state lays so much emphasis on education here is because it is an OBC as opposed to an ST dominated panchayat.
21. According to a Harvard University Civil Rights Project, the hard-fought gains of US school integration are eroding. More than 70 per cent of black students attend schools that have more than 50 per cent minority enrolment compared with 63 per cent in 1980. About 36.5 per cent of these students attend school with a minority enrolment of 90–100 per cent compared with 32.5 per cent in 1986. The same trend also applies to the Latino community (mentioned in *Time*, 13 August 2001).
22. Madan (this volume) reminds us in a timely fashion that the social background of teachers and their socialisation and world-view may often be contrary to the kind of education they are expected to impart. These very attitudes often create biases within a classroom and may directly perpetuate and maintain social inequalities within the system.
23. We can merely conjecture regarding this absence. Evidence from North India indicates that rituals of social distancing are more marked between social groups who are at the extremes of the hierarchical order. Further, Gupta (2000) argues that processes of social differentiation are less about maintaining hierarchy as opposed to affirming differences between social groups. Thus it would be fair to presume that the existing spatial segregation of the communities in the village and the nominal representation of SC and ST children in the GPS do not call for elaborate social distancing practices.

9 MORE UNEQUAL THAN OTHERS:

EVIDENCE FROM SURGUJA DISTRICT, CHHATTISGARH

Vidhya Das¹

The rural poor, especially the landless, and the STs and SCs from the backward regions perhaps represent the pockets of very low educational attainment in India. According to the 1991 Census, only 30 per cent of the tribal population in the country was literate compared to 52 per cent of the general population. Although this is a threefold increase since 1961, a review of the data indicates that the gap in literacy rates between tribes and the general population actually increased from 18 per cent in 1971 to 22 per cent in 1991.

Gender differences are also evident. The female literacy rate among tribal women was only 18 per cent in 1991 and the literacy gap between the former and general category of women was as high as 21 per cent. Similar disparities are observed in primary education where, though the enrolment of tribal children has increased from 4.7 to 8 million between 1981 and 1991, there are still sharp differences in school participation between tribal (45 per cent) and non-tribal (63 per cent) children and between girls (26 per cent) and boys (45 per cent) within tribal communities.² These rates vary across states and although they are much lower than the average, at the national level the numbers are highly correlated with overall literacy rates in the states and inter-group disparities tend to decline as average literacy increases (Vaidyanathan and Nair 2001).

Given this rather dismal situation, in this study we have made an attempt to explore the social and gender equity issues that are implicated in DPEP's mandate of universal primary education, especially as it plays

out within the context of a 'tribes' dominated state, namely Chhattisgarh. The state was created in November 2000 and is considered by political observers to be in its infancy. However prior to its creation, it was an integral part of Madhya Pradesh and hence witness to the innovative collaborative intensity of DPEP and the RGSM in the area of primary education since 1994 (see Chapter 8). The LSA conducted in 1996 highlighted the fact that the tribal areas of undivided Madhya Pradesh were the most deprived in terms of primary schooling facilities. Because of the scattered settlement pattern within tribal villages, not all children living in the village had easy access to the village school. According to Sharma and Gopalakrishnan (1999: 2547), 'this accounted for the very low status of primary education and literacy in tribal areas and needed to be responded to through an area-specific strategy. The EGS by scaling down the norm from 40 to 25 children to start an EGS in tribal areas was seeking to respond to this need of tribal habitations out of the reach of the formal schooling system.' The current DPEP initiatives in Chhattisgarh are a continuation of these efforts and focus on improving educational infrastructure and providing all children access to primary schools through the EGS within the larger context of decentralisation and community participation.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

We have located our study in the Surguja district, which was selected due to the presence of a high percentage (53.7 per cent) of tribals in its population.⁴ It is the northern-most district of the state bordering Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, with its headquarters located at a distance of 300 kilometres from the state capital of Raipur. Because of the rather inhospitable terrain, the actual journey by road to the district stretches to an interminable eight to 10 hours. We noticed that the same geographical inaccessibility also seemed to define the settlement pattern within the district. It is constituted of 24 blocks, which have been sub-divided into 309 smaller clusters for the purpose of facilitating DPEP management. Comprising 9.5 per cent of the state's population, the district ranks fourth in terms of population size, and 14th in terms of literacy rates. In overall terms, the literacy rates for Surguja have gone up from 27.34 per cent to 55.37 per cent from the last census count and female literacy rates also

show an increase from 15.21 per cent to 42.17 per cent. However, we need to keep in mind that these numbers, though positive, are among the lowest in the DPEP districts as well as in the state itself (with the Bastar and Dantewada districts having lower literacy rates) (Acharya 2001). In terms of sex ratio, the district ranks 14th in Chhattisgarh, with seven out of 16 districts having a sex ratio of more than 1,000 in the state. The overall sex ratio of the state has gone up from 985 in 1991 to 990 in 2001, while the sex ratio for Surguja has increased from 966 in 1991 to 972 (GOI 2001b: Part 23) and can be viewed as being reflective of more equal gender relations in tribal society.

According to the DPEP Surguja 2000–01 report, the district has a total of 3,348 primary schools, 1,041 EGS, 220 AS and 257 Early Childhood Centres for Education. According to the report, the Annual Plan for 2001–02 for the district highlights the following initiatives:

- Decentralisation of power from the state to the districts and finally to the panchayats.
- To give ownership of tasks to village, panchayat, block and district.
- To generate synergised action for primary education and literacy at the local level of societal mission to do away with redundant and parallel field structures.
- Strengthening Jan Shiksha Kendra comprising a cluster of eight to 10 schools across the state for decentralised academic and administrative management.
- To fuse elementary and adult education activities.
- To devolve administrative power to combine administrative and academic management.

DPEP in Chhattisgarh further reinforces the importance of the LSA and defines it as a 'campaign to let the community come forward with its perceptions'. The objectives of LSA have been drawn up in detail and they include assessment of status of schooling facilities; survey of school-going children in school and out of school with the help of a combined team of panchayat-level functionaries, teachers and VEC members; developing local understanding of the causes of non-enrolment and trigger local community action for educational planning. The EGS have also been given due importance, and there are training programmes and workshops planned for the Gurujis of the EGS, along with the appointment of

120 Gurujis in the coming year, and there is an emphasis on the time-bound printing and production of textbooks.

The planning for the year 2001–02 also includes proposals for training and orientation workshops at different levels for motivational inputs, ensuring quality and analysing evaluation data. A ‘Headstart’ programme has been proposed in different districts, with 19 blocks to be covered in the Surguja district for introducing computer education in schools. At the block and cluster levels, Block Academic Groups (BAGs) and Cluster Academic Groups (CAGs) are being involved to provide academic support to teachers. However, there appears to be little real effort at planning from below or for encouraging community involvement: amongst the several programmes of workshops and training, there is only one orientation programme and one single-day training programme for VECs. Nor are events or processes to include Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) functionaries apparent.

TABLE 9.1
Panchayat ‘A’ and ‘B’: An overview

<i>Features</i>	<i>Village ‘A’</i>	<i>Village ‘B’</i>
Population	1,322	1,728
Male	696	871
Female	626	857
ST male	310	
ST female	284	
Total	594	950
SC male	32	
SC female	19	
Total	51	135
Other castes male	324	
Other castes female	323	
Total	647	643
Primary school	1	3
PS teacher	2	7
Middle school	1	1
High school	0	1
EGS school	1	1
EGS teachers	2	2

Source: Panchayat records, August 2001.

Given the stated objectives of the DPEP report, we were eager to experience the grassroots reality and observe first-hand the impact of these initiatives on primary education among the ST communities in the district.

We were very keen to explore whether the Madhya Pradesh government's objective of reaching out to the 'hardest to reach' tribal hamlets had been jumpstarted in the district when it was a part of undivided Madhya Pradesh. Further, we were also curious about how the newly formed state, with an explicit tribal majority, was engaging with the earlier efforts undertaken in the area of primary education.

The selection of the research panchayat 'A' was done on the basis of discussions with the local chapter of Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS) in Raipur, who also provided us with field support (see Tables 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4 for details of schools in village 'A'). In keeping with the larger parameters of the micro studies, the team observed the primary school and the EGS in panchayat 'A', and conducted interviews and discussions with various groups in the village. We found the situation rather dismal and uninspiring. Wondering whether this was an exception or outlier, we decided to include another panchayat—panchayat 'B'—in our research design to ascertain whether the situation of primary education vis-à-vis equity issues in the first panchayat was representative or whether there were differing patterns and situations prevalent in the district. Needless to say, given the time constraints, we were unable to study the latter in as much depth as the previous panchayat and so we decided to concentrate primarily on the local EGS. The attempt per se has provided us with a comparative framework, albeit limited, to highlight the gender and social equity issues that frame primary education in Surguja.

TABLE 9.2
Overview of school facilities in village 'A' as on 13 August 2001

	GPS	EGS
Building structure	Pucca, but falling down!	Pucca
No. of classes	I-V	I-V
No. of rooms	3	2
Co-educational	Yes	Yes
No. of teachers	2 male (1 Shiksha Karmi)	2 (1 male and 1 female)
Multi-grade teaching	Yes	Yes
Teacher-pupil Ratio	1:60 (notionally)	1:62
Basic TLM	No	Yes
Midday meal	No	Yes
Library	No	No
Drinking water	Yes	Yes, local well. Water not portable.
Toilets	No	No
Playground	Yes	Yes

Source: Fieldwork data.

TABLE 9.3
Survey of school-age children in hamlet 'A'

<i>Age-group</i>	<i>Total Boys</i>	<i>Total Girls</i>	<i>SC Boys</i>	<i>SC Girls</i>	<i>ST Boys</i>	<i>ST Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
6-11	57	39	2	1	35	25	96
11-14	26	22	3	—	15	11	48
Age 3	9	8	0	1	7	4	17
Age 4	8	11	2	—	3	9	19
Age 5	3	5	—	1	3	4	8
Total 3-14	103	85	7	3	63	53	188

Source: Survey data with schoolteacher—done in 2000 of 'A' village—main hamlet—the catchment area of GPS only.

TABLE 9.4
Enrolment in primary school 'A'

<i>Class</i>			<i>SC/ST Boys</i>		<i>SC/ST Girls</i>		<i>Handicapped boys and girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
			<i>ST</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>ST</i>	<i>SC</i>		
Class I	5	8	2	0	6	1		13
Class II	22	17	16	0	10	0		39
Class III	19	11	16	0	7	0		30
Class IV	10	12	6	1	9	1	1 ST boy, partially blind	23
Class V	9	6	7	0	3	0		15
Total								120

Source: School register (date of visit: 7 August 2001).

PANCHAYAT A: NEGOTIATING THE RHETORIC AND REALITY OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

We reached panchayat 'A' in the morning on 7 August 2001 with no prior intimation to the village or the sarpanch, so that we could observe how the schools were being run on an ordinary, day-to-day basis. The panchayat is located about 20 kilometres from the block headquarters and has a population of 1,327 spread over eight hamlets. It primarily comprises ST, SC, OBC and FC groups. There are two schools for primary education (one GPS and one EGS), and one middle school in the panchayat.⁵ The numerically largest group in the village is that of the Majhvars (ST), followed by the Kultha (OBC) and the Kunwars (ST). Despite both being classified as ST, it would be erroneous to treat the Majhvars and the Kunwars as a single homogenous group. The socio-economic positions of the tribal communities in the village are very different. The

sarpanch's seat is reserved for members of the ST and is currently occupied by a Kunwar.

The village has substantial tracts of irrigated land, only a part of which is owned by the residents of the village, the rest being controlled by absentee landlords from Ambikapur, the district headquarters of Surguja. The Kunwar, despite being numerically small, own a significant amount of land in the village and exhibit a higher literacy rate.⁶ Availability of water resources is necessary for sugarcane cropping, and a major portion of land under sugarcane belongs to the sarpanch. The subsistence of the majority of village households, however, depends on sharecropping and agricultural wage labour. The Majhvars are economically disadvantaged and own little land. Most of them are wage labourers who seasonally migrate for work. They also lack political representation in the local political structures despite their numerical preponderance in the village.

However, it needs to be acknowledged that despite this hierarchical ordering among the ST communities, in the larger picture the sarpanch does not seem to wield much power in the village. This was evident in his helplessness in influencing the regularity of the PS teachers, as also in his inability to direct village development works. Though a committee has been constituted to oversee the watershed development programme that is underway in the village, the sarpanch is not a member of this committee, nor is he privy to the nature of works that are to be taken up under the project.

GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOL

The local GPS is housed in a pucca building (three rooms and a veranda) that was built in 1989 under Operation Blackboard, and a little over a decade later is in a state of intense disrepair, lending credence to local rumours regarding its imminent collapse. Other than a playground, it boasts of no other basic facility like toilets, drinking water provision or TLM. On the day of our visit, a handful of children were playing around, and one of the teachers had just arrived on his motorcycle from a neighbouring village. The few children who had come kept their bags and books in the veranda, as none of the other three classrooms were operational. The walls were cracking, the plaster falling and the roof had leaked water all over the floor. One of the rooms seemed to be on the verge of collapse, as there was water gushing out from below. Since our visit had coincided with the monsoons, there was no possibility of running the school outside either. As we asked the teacher about the school and

its records, the other teacher arrived. It was past 11.30 in the morning. There were no signs of a midday meal being cooked in the vicinity. On inquiring, we found that this has been discontinued since the school reopened after the summer holidays because the Pradhan was not providing the necessary supplies. On being questioned, the Pradhan claimed that the midday meal was being served in the school, but that it was not being cooked on that particular day, as the helper was absent. This, however, does not seem to be true, since there was no evidence of daily cooking anywhere.

The 12 children who were in the school were all of different ages. Initially, they were shy, but slowly they opened up and started talking, the younger children much more freely than the older, the girls more easily than the boys. They said that other children do not come to school as they are afraid that the 'building will fall down'. When asked why they were not afraid, there was no response. A look at the enrolment registers indicates, at least on paper, that of the 24 students who enrolled in class I in 1997–98, only 10 children made it to class V in 2001–02; and of the 32 children who joined the cohort in class II, only five made it to class V. Of these, only five were present in the school during fieldwork. The teacher did not seem to have much information on the out-of-school children, or even the total number of children in the different communities that this school caters to. However, many of the children informed us that some of their friends attended the local EGS. According to the teachers, although 119 children are enrolled in the school, only 35 to 40 children come every day. The Pradhan reiterated this, saying that around '25 to 30 children come to school, but due to heavy rains, the school has not been functioning properly in the last three weeks'. Interestingly enough, the attendance register had marked most children present in July and in the first week of August.

A few of the children who were in school on the day of our visit have been studying there for the last three years. Conversations revealed that some of their friends, brothers and sisters go to different schools—the primary school in the neighbouring village or the Shishu Mandir (a private school) in the neighbouring panchayat. They were too shy to read their books aloud or participate in any activity we tried to engage them in. Only one child wrote out his name and the name of his village; the others refused to even take out their pencils and notebooks. Despite their reticence, they were quite clear regarding which teachers they liked or disliked. They preferred the junior master (a Shiksha Karmi), who was

regular and 'did not beat them', to the senior master, who was not only irregular but also beat them frequently.

Conversations with the teachers further underlined the hopelessness of the situation. The teachers are both males belonging to the ST community. While the senior teacher is a graduate and B.Ed, and teaches full-time, the other has completed his matriculation and falls within the Shiksha Karmi category. The former commutes 3 kilometres on his motorcycle every day to reach the school where he has been teaching since 1986. Because he was inebriated on that day, our conversation with him was rather unproductive, punctuated with vague, unconnected statements. However, three factors did emerge regarding the run-down nature of the school. First, an older teacher, the previous headmaster, had recently retired and since his retirement the school appears to have started deteriorating. Second, the condition of the building deters children from attending school. (The teacher expected an increase in attendance after 15 August, as the celebrations on that day attract children.) Third, the introduction in 1996 of the government scheme to supply girls with dresses served as an incentive for girls to come to school.

While we were speaking to his senior colleague, the junior teacher was busy teaching children of a mixed age-group. He was as reticent when we spoke to him. He had studied in a missionary school and had attended several trainings, but was unable to say whether and how the training programmes have helped him. He could not explain the poor attendance in class. He said that in the past, when he made the effort to talk to parents, school attendance did go up. However, he has not done the same this year and was unable to explain the reason for his indifference. He further complained that parents are not interested in sending their children to school, that they never ask about the children or their studies. The overall impression we were left with was that of a dysfunctional school with students hardly attending, let alone learning anything, a state of affairs that seems to have been fostered by the indifference of local authorities and teachers to the functioning of the school.

EDUCATION GUARANTEE SCHEME SCHOOL

The EGS school in the village is housed in a pucca building, with two proper classrooms, one enclosed veranda and a storeroom. It was constructed as recently as 1999 and is in good condition, although the construction seems poor. The school is in a hamlet populated mainly by the OBC community of Kulthas. The majority of the people in this community

are sharecroppers and small-time traders. Having migrated from Orissa a generation ago because of poverty in their villages, this group seems to have established itself by dint of hard labour and perseverance. Very few tribal children attend this school because of its distance from the tribal hamlets. During the rainy season, a canal across the road overflows and makes it more difficult for the children to commute. Earlier, there were two AS running in the area. One was converted to an EGS school in 1997, and the other was merged with the EGS school in 2000. Currently, the school has so many children that the teachers say they have had to refuse admissions to several children. It is similar to the GPS in that it lacks all the basic facilities—toilets, drinking water, playground, TLM, etc. However, the similarity ends here because it is evident that despite the limited resources, the EGS is a functional school.

There are two Gurujis attached to the school, one male and one female. When we reached the school, the teacher was organising the children for prayer. They were made to stand in rows, and boys from one of the columns stepped out and led the songs to be sung. In the meantime, a little boy had swept the classroom, giving us hope that maybe gender awareness has reached the far corners of India. Then children ran in for roll call, and more songs were sung, again led by some boys. All this took place with the entire school crowding into one classroom. The walls of the classes were bare and whitewashed. The children of the lower classes sat on the bare floor. Children of classes IV and V had mats to sit on. The children usually sit in straight columns, one behind the other, with space in between to allow the teacher to move up and down as he teaches. A couple of plastic chairs are provided for the teachers. The teaching material is kept in a trunk in the storeroom. The senior classes are housed in the two rooms while the two lower classes occupy what looks like an enclosed veranda.

TABLE 9.5
Enrolment in EGS 'A'

Class	Boys	Girls	SC Boys	ST Boys	SC Girls	ST Girls	OBC Boys	OBC Girls	Total
Class I	18	6	–	3	–	1	15	5	24
Class II	15	11	–	7	1	3	7	7	26
Class III	10	10	3	3	–	1	3	8	20
Class IV	14	15	–	4	1	1	10	12	29
Class V	9	6	–	2	–	–	6	3	15
Total	66	48	3	9	2	–	41	35	114

Source: EGS 'A' school register.

The female teacher belongs to a forward caste community. Her husband teaches in a high school in a nearby village. They have been able to buy 5 acres of land in village 'A', where they have now settled, even though they are from Ambikapur town (district headquarters). She comes to school at 11.00 a.m. (though the school starts at 10.00 a.m.) accompanied by her 4-year-old daughter. She is doing her BCT course, and has periodically received training almost every year since she joined in 1996. She is a confident teacher and has strong views on children's performance and teaching methods and approach. According to her, children need to be reprimanded (sometimes even beaten) if they do not do their work. 'This does not scare them, but ensures that they come back to school with their work completed the next day.' She added that children whose parents are more educated tend to pay more attention to their studies and therefore perform much better in school. She was particularly emphatic about this, pointing out that children from poor families face lots of difficulties in school. 'We have different methods to encourage them to learn from other children and to help them.' Our classroom observation, however, revealed a rather contrary picture. We saw that in actual practice, she paid attention to only three or four children, while the others were ignored, even when they were responsive. The children she favoured also happened to be the more articulate ones in the classroom—most of the articulate children belonged to the OBC community.

The male teacher is a matriculate who has also received yearly training in Ambikapur along with his colleague. He, too, has been with the school since its inception. He arrives at the school before the female teacher and helps children clean the classrooms and conducts the assembly and roll call. He takes two classes in one of the rooms. During our observation, we found that the children sat grouped together according to their abilities. The teacher began by writing out the topic he was about to teach on the blackboard, and started reading out from the book. He did not seem too concerned about whether the children were able to follow him. In the middle, he asked one or two children to stand up and answer questions, and then continued to proceed with the lesson. Two boys were questioned more frequently than others. He then turned his attention to some of the girls. The children from the lower classes were neglected. After some time, these children seemed to get restless. He came up to the boys and told them to keep quiet, even though it was the girls who seemed to be having much more fun and were responsible for the disturbance in the classroom. Time and again, he told the boys to keep quiet, but did not admonish the girls.

When he finished with the older children, he started teaching language to the younger children. Here again, he did not ascertain whether all the children had their books. The girls in the group continued with their whispered chattering, while three boys took out their books and began following the lesson. The others carried on with whatever they were doing before. Though the teacher claimed that he has benefited from the training to use play way methods, etc., he did not appear to use them in the classroom. Many of the children did not have books, and he complained that this made teaching difficult. The teacher also had a language problem, as the majority of the children are from the Kultha community, who migrated from Orissa about 50 years ago.

On the two days that we visited the school, we observed that the teachers were focusing on the same group of children. Those in the youngest age-group were left to their own devices. They played quietly amongst themselves, sometimes running into the other classrooms, where an older brother or sister might have a book, pencil or slate of theirs. During the afternoon of the second day, the female teacher finally got down to taking classes with the younger children.

Although we ourselves did not observe any instance of physical punishment in the school, informal conversations with children revealed that their teachers beat them frequently. Further, the son of a locally powerful family, who also attends school, is the local bully and often hits the children, but the teachers do little to stop this. The cohort study indicates that of 36 children who joined class I in 1998–99, only 10 were promoted to class II. In class II, 23 new children joined this cohort (no information on whether they were new students or detained from the previous batch was available). Out of the 33 children who were now in class II, 30 were promoted to class III; no new children joined this cohort. Of these 30 children, 25 were promoted to class IV, where four new children joined the cohort—making a total of 29 children. Of these, 25 were promoted to class V, with four children who had been detained from the earlier batch joining them. The cohort analysis seems to indicate a rather low annual rate of detention for the cohort as well as additions to the cohort.

A closer look at the demographic composition of the two schools in panchayat 'A' reveals an interesting social dynamic regarding who goes to which school. Children from the OBC hamlet as well as the main hamlet attend the functional EGS, which is located in the OBC hamlet. The locally powerful families also send their children to the EGS, including the sarpanch and the trading community. The EGS children realise the

significance of their school compared to the primary school. According to the children, they attend this school and not the primary school which is closer, 'because we like to come here. Nobody goes there, and parents have told us to attend this school.'

Records show that there are only 15 children from the main hamlet of 'A' attending the EGS. Given the fact that the local survey documents 188 children of school-going age in the hamlet and a daily attendance of less than 40 children in the local GPS, this clearly leaves a substantial number of children out of school. Who are these 'missing children' and where are they? In the absence of data on the caste/community break-up of school-going children, we have no choice but to make assumptions on the basis of evidence available. The children of the Majhvar community, which is the most populous in the vicinity of the GPS, are conspicuous by their absence. Only five children from this community attend the EGS. Casual conversations with a host of villagers indicated that many of them tend cattle and some work in the homes of families that own land. Some children accompany their parents in search of wage labour and a number of girls spend long hours at home looking after their siblings, fetching water and firewood or going out with their mothers. As it was the rice-transplanting season, women were busy in the field and we did not come across any children in the village. We did meet some children a little distance away from the village, grazing cattle or sitting near the fields looking after their younger siblings. Is poverty the primary reason why these children do not attend school or is it that the state of the school does not inspire confidence among children or their parents?

To explore this further, we arranged for informal meetings and focus-group discussions with different communities as well as the VEC. A theme that constantly emerged was that it was the irregularity of the teachers and the poor condition of the school building that was the major constraint to school participation. Further probing highlighted a whole range of issues regarding the dismal state of primary education in the panchayat. VEC members were apathetic to the plight of the GPS. The head teacher did not have a rapport with the VEC and felt aggrieved. He said that the panchayat ignores the GPS and does not provide the midday meal regularly. On the other hand, the panchayat members complained that they had little control over the GPS, which is dysfunctional. They argued that the midday meal is not served because there are very few children in school! What is doubly interesting is that the emphasis varied depending on whom we were conversing with.

At the last meeting of the VEC that was held over a year ago, expenditure incurred on 'meeting arrangements and tea' (Rs 500) was approved. The register does not record attendance of members, and previous records show that five members out of a 15-member committee attend meetings. The teacher was unable to give us the names of VEC members. When a VEC meeting was convened at the request of the research team, not a single woman member was able to attend (we were told that they were busy in the fields). The committee said they felt helpless about the dysfunctional GPS. The sarpanch, who is also the chairman of the committee, said that he had raised this issue at the panchayat meeting, and also complained to the officials, but no action had been taken. We were not able to pursue the issue further, as it led to too much tension in the meeting. It was also revealed that the head teacher is well connected and has successfully resisted transfer to another school as this GPS is very close to his home.

The focus-group discussion in the OBC hamlet of the village centred on the EGS school and the performance of children enrolled therein. While they all admitted that the EGS school functions regularly and the teachers are motivated, they were not entirely satisfied. There are several children in this hamlet, including two girls who attend high school, who are keen to start a private school for younger children.

The women of the village came together for a meeting in the evening in two separate groups: OBC and ST. Almost all girls from the OBC community attend school (with the exception of one child who dropped out in class IV because her parents needed her to work at home). As mentioned earlier, most ST families do not send their children to school regularly. The OBC women assured us that their girls were doing very well and their studies were not affected by the chores they did at home. But the fact remained that several girls often came late because they were held up by housework. This was borne out during conversations with the children. The discussion with the ST women mainly centred on why the school was not running, and why the women had not raised the issue in panchayat meetings. Most of the problems were ascribed to the condition of the school building and the irregularity of the teachers. Several villagers cited irregular attendance by teachers as the main cause for the school being dysfunctional. As mentioned earlier, the head teacher is an alcoholic; he arrives at around 11.00 a.m. and leaves by 3.00 p.m.

An interesting aside was a complaint by the sarpanch that women do not attend the gram sabha or other panchayat meetings. The woman

ward member admitted that this was true, but she also claimed that the women are overworked and have little time for anything else.

The local dynamics that are evident in panchayat 'A' present a rather complicated picture of mutually reinforcing local hierarchies, administrative indifference, alienating spatial geographies and disabling poverty that are having a powerful impact on primary education. In an interesting twist of events, the local EGS has become the monopoly of the powerful OBC and tribal elite, while the dysfunctional GPS is viewed as the terrain of the disempowered Majhvar community. What exactly are the reasons for children of the Majhvar community not being able to study? Poverty is definitely one. However, some children from the community regularly travel more than a kilometre every day to attend the EGS school. This indicates that at least some members of the community appreciate the need for education. Speculating on whether the non-functionality of the school deters the children from coming, or whether the school does not function because the children do not come, is like having the chicken and egg argument. The fact remains that the tribal community in this village is very stressed due to poverty. Had the school in their hamlet been functioning, at least some of them would have made the effort to send their children to study. Since the teachers are irregular, and the teaching is of a very poor standard, parents no longer bother to send their children to school. With no records available, it is difficult to tell exactly how many children are out of school. It also seems that the increasing emphasis laid by various government functionaries on education and on sending children to school has served to make the community 'silent' on this issue. This makes it even more difficult to determine the reasons why children are not attending school.

VILLAGE 'B'—QUEST FOR FUNCTIONAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Our experiences in panchayat 'A' were rather disappointing. We felt we needed to explore whether the state of primary education in this panchayat was fairly representative of Surguja or whether we had inadvertently stumbled on a rather 'different' panchayat. We randomly selected a neighbouring panchayat 'B' for comparison and to further explore factors that frame access, enrolment and attendance in primary schools. We found that the situation in this panchayat was not very different from panchayat 'A'. Panchayat 'B' seemed to be more scattered with hamlets at a much

greater distance from each other. Further, it is divided by a river and the EGS school is again located in the SC hamlet that is separated from the rest of the village by the river. The total population is 1,772 and is composed of ST, SC, BC and FC communities. The village has four schools, three primary schools (one each in three of the four hamlets) and one EGS school located in the fourth hamlet. The sarpanch is from the tribal community of Kunwar and again, there were hardly any records available as the secretary was away. The schools we visited had records of the children enrolled, but no record of the children in the village or the demographic composition of the panchayat and its different hamlets.

The GPS-‘B’ is located in a pucca building comprising a single room (about 15' × 12') constructed in 1997. It is in fairly good condition and is right next to the old school building which is in a state of complete dilapidation and unsafe for habitation. The latter is probably no more than 15 years old and it is apparent that no expenditure has been incurred on its repair or maintenance. Like the schools in the previous panchayat, this one, too, lacks basic facilities with the exception of a functional hand pump in the vicinity of the building. Despite reaching the school at 10.30 a.m., we observed that none of the teachers were present. According to our information, there are three teachers in this school: two Shiksha Karmis (one male and one female) and one full-time male teacher.

When we arrived, there were 12 children outside the building trying to clear a patch of grass. Some were pulling out weeds while others were digging up the grass with a hoe. On being questioned, the children informed us that the teacher had asked them to do this task. They were quite vocal in the absence of their ‘masters’ and affirmed that the teachers usually came late to school and were also irregular. They often beat the students with a ruler, or even slapped them. One child explained that this was because ‘we do not do our studies properly’. As we were talking to the children, the regular teacher arrived and told us that he was late because he had some important work to do. However, he stressed that he usually gets to school on time. Barring two transfers for periods of two and four years respectively, he has been teaching in this school since 1987. He has bought land in a neighbouring village, where he has settled with his family. He thus commutes to school every day on his bicycle. He is not a matriculate and claims to be over 60 years old! The male Shiksha Karmi teacher arrived at noon, with the excuse that he had been delayed by the death of a lady in his neighbourhood. The third teacher did not arrive at all.

All the children were made to sit in this single classroom, with no attempt to group them according to their age or abilities. The older children were able to write their names and other simple words. A cohort analysis of children who joined in class I in 1998–99 gives a confusing picture, as every year, at least 10 children have joined, and most of the older ones seem to have dropped out. Only four children, two girls and two boys, have continued from class I up to class IV. One of the teachers explained that even though these children are enrolled in this school, the sarpanch is encouraging everybody to go to the EGS school, as the teachers there are from the same village and there is more political support for the EGS school. However, as mentioned earlier, a large number of children in 'B' do not seem to be attending any school.

The EGS 'B' is without a building and is currently housed in sheds constructed for the weekly market. It, too, lacks basic facilities with the exception of drinking water, as there is a hand pump nearby. The teachers reported that they have been provided with TLM but are currently unable to use it, as there is no convenient place to store the material. There is not even any proper place to keep the blackboard in the classrooms. Here, even though the situation of the EGS school is comparable or worse (with regard to facilities) than that of the primary school, it was once again the EGS that was drawing children and catering to the educational needs of the community. As the school is located in the SC hamlet, most of the children who come here are from this hamlet. On the day of our visit, the classes seemed to be running to more than their full capacity with just two teachers trying to manage five classes. But the interest and enthusiasm shown by the students and the full attendance in classes was a positive sign.

TABLE 9.6
Enrolment in EGS 'B'

Class	Scheduled Tribes		Scheduled Castes		OBC		General Castes		Total	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
I	3	2	3	8	11	9	1	2	18	21
II	3	1	10	2	0	6	1	0	14	9
III	1	0	4	3	6	4	2	0	13	7
IV	0	0	2	3	2	1	1	1	5	5
V	3	0	4	4	7	0	2	1	16	5
Total	10	3	23	20	26	20	7	4	66	47

Source: EGS 'B' register.

There was not much time for detailed observation in this school. A brief spell in the classroom revealed that boys in class III could read and write. But since the girls did not respond, we were unable to ascertain their reading and writing skills. However, in another class, the difference between the boys and the girls was marked. Only two boys came to the blackboard to write out the names of their village, state, and that of the chief minister. The other boys, and all the girls, sat silently. When the girls were asked why they were not responding, they became even more silent—perhaps because of our presence. We were informed that six or seven children from the other side of the village were currently enrolled in this school. When we asked the teachers to crosscheck whether children enrolled in GPS-‘B’ are attending EGS-‘B’, none of the names read out seemed to match. Thus, the belief of the GPS teacher that most of the children are attending the EGS school seems to be misplaced. As in panchayat ‘A’, in panchayat ‘B’ also, a large number of children do not seem to be going to any school at all.

Discussions with teachers revealed that they regularly receive training in innovative methods of teaching, as well as in coping with multi-grade teaching, which has proved helpful to them. However, the teachers were very vocal regarding their high workload, and the fact that the remuneration they received was grossly inadequate for the amount of time and effort they put in (compared to the GPS teachers). Both teachers live in the village, one of them in the hamlet where the school is located and the other in the main village, about 1.5 kilometres away. There is no VEC for the school, and according to the teachers, community support is meagre. The teachers spoke of getting little or no support from the parents. However, the more than adequate number of children in each class perhaps indicates tacit acceptance and appreciation by the community. This was reinforced by our interaction with the community who, while acknowledging that the local EGS was better than the other schools, did not indicate any interest in improving the running of the school. The EGS school was soon to get a new building; construction was already underway and expected to be finished in three months.

CONCLUSION

EXPLORING GENDER AND SOCIAL EQUITY

The field evidence from Surguja is disturbing, especially in the context of evidence from other DPEP states selected for this series of micro studies

where, courtesy DPEP, schools not only have the basic facilities of water, toilets, buildings, etc., but also function regularly, and only a few children remain out of school. This exception is baffling. Does this suggest that there was bias (however unintended) within DPEP in Madhya Pradesh, where areas with majority ST populations were relatively ignored compared to more politically relevant districts like Betul, also covered in this research study? The evidence takes on a more complex hue when it is firmly located within the context of the EGS initiative in Madhya Pradesh. Despite the stated objective to reach out to remote 'tribal' habitations, the reality is that the presence of EGS in the two research panchayats seems to have actually widened as well as strengthened the social inequalities between the local groups by privileging one group's access to primary schooling. What is more ironical is that the majority of the local communities focused on in this study (SC and ST) consistently occupy the bottom rungs of the socio-economic ladder and at first glance can be considered homogenously poor. However, this is not so, and even conceding the larger economic insecurity, some are especially 'more unequal than others'—namely, the more deprived communities like the Majhvar within the ST category.

GPS vs EGS

In both villages that we visited, and especially in 'A', the tribal children—particularly the most deprived/poor among them—are not able to access primary education. This is despite the fact that the GPS is located closer to their hamlet. In fact, the opening of the EGS school seems to have exacerbated the problem of access for tribal children. Evidence from panchayat 'A' indicates that before the opening of the EGS schools, the GPS seemed to have functioned fairly regularly. Now, the sarpanch and other families of the panchayat are sending their children to the EGS. Hence, these families, who also happen to be powerful and relatively well-off, have little interest in ensuring that the GPS functions properly. Despite high enrolment, only a very few tribal children attend regularly. This is not to say that the introduction of EGS has caused the deterioration of the GPS. The point that should be explored is that in a tribal majority district like Surguja, it needs to be acknowledged that access to a school may not be a problem for all tribal hamlets. Rather, along with access for some, the existing GPS facilities that cater to these hamlets would need to have been rejuvenated. This has not happened. Given this, the

introduction of EGS schools in primarily non-ST hamlets has inadvertently had an adverse impact on the already severely impaired GPS.

In both villages, there are different schools being run by the government. These schools vary in terms of the facilities they offer, the teaching approach they follow, the qualifications of their teachers and the remuneration paid to them. The District DPEP Coordinator confirmed that in the Surguja district, along with two other districts in Chhattisgarh, 75 per cent of the support for EGS comes from DPEP. He said that these districts have been selected for extra support from DPEP because they are larger in size. DPEP runs 49 EGS schools in this particular block, which also has 150 primary schools. There are several differences between these two sets of schools. The method and approach in DPEP schools differs from that followed in primary schools. The teachers here are trained in the play way method of teaching, which emphasises the principle of joyful learning. In addition, the teacher is given special training to manage two or more classes at the same time. *The frequency as well as the length of training for the EGS teachers is longer than that for the primary school teachers.* The textbooks are also different in keeping with the erstwhile policy of undivided Madhya Pradesh (an integrated package was introduced in Madhya Pradesh in 2001) where the Seekhna-Sikhana package was used in the primary schools as opposed to the Digantar AS package in the EGS. Those used in the primary schools are based on the assumption that children will move from one class to another every year, whereas the textbooks followed in DPEP schools are based on learning stages and ability of children.

TEACHERS AND DISCRIMINATION

There is a striking difference in the remuneration paid to teachers, though the necessary teaching qualifications for DPEP-run primary schools and the EGS schools are the same. The EGS teacher is entitled to Rs 1,000 a month, while the primary school teacher under the Shiksha Karmi programme gets Rs 2,500. Why is there this in-built inequality? Low remuneration impacts negatively on the performance of teachers as it affects their interest and involvement. This, in turn, affects the level of enrolment in the school. At present, the EGS in the Surguja district, which is slightly more than 3 years old, seems to be running quite well, especially when compared to the primary school. Yet the fact remains that the education department and the village community turn a blind eye to the slack

performance of teachers who receive much higher salaries and have access to more facilities, while the EGS teachers struggle to deliver far beyond their capacity, managing more than two classes in crowded classrooms. Neither the DPEP units, nor the department of education, the village community or the administration seem to be able to do anything about errant teachers in the primary schools. Why are more resources being ploughed into schools where nothing is happening, and why are non-performing teachers not being called to account? As mentioned earlier, sarpanch 'A' seems to be completely helpless since, even after he has complained to the concerned officials, no action has been taken.

Politically, however, EGS schools appear to have more support, and that seems to keep them going for now. Several questions need to be dealt with here: How long will the EGS teachers continue to perform, given their low salaries and high pressure of work? Will the very political patronage, that helps them run the schools well, soon be used by these teachers to get paid without doing any work, as is happening with their much better paid counterparts in the primary school? There is no doubt that the EGS schools seem to have eased pressure on the primary schools to perform. In tribal areas, this has led to tribal hamlets, where more often than not the primary school is located, being deprived access to any functioning educational institution at the primary level.

TACKLING GENDER EQUITY

With limited access to schools in the area, gender, too, seems to be a casualty of local power politics. We can see from the cohort analysis that girls and boys are admitted in the schools in more or less equal numbers. But, when it comes to going on to higher classes, more boys than girls move up. In both the middle schools, the number of boys is much higher than the number of girls. There also seems to be an in-built difference in the approach to boys and girls amongst the male teachers in both the EGS schools studied. In the 'B' EGS, the two male teachers actually believed that academically, girls cannot do as well as boys. Their attitude was reflected in the performance of the girls in their school. They were not forthcoming in classroom participation, and sat at the back of the class. In the 'A' EGS, where the number of girls was much lower than the boys, not only was the male teacher discriminatory in his approach, the female teacher too gave more opportunities to the boys in class, though in response to our questions she affirmed that girls and boys have equal abilities. She

also pointed out that since girls have to finish a lot of chores at home before they come to school and are often late, they are hampered in their studies. This indeed seemed to be a problem, as we found many of the girls coming late to school.

WHITHER COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION...

Community participation has been an important ingredient of the DPEP initiative and it is stating the obvious when we say that it is glaringly conspicuous by its absence in the panchayats we visited. In both villages, neither the local bodies, nor the panchayats or the VECs seem to be involved in the management of the schools. Even though the EGS teachers are paid through the panchayat, it does not do much beyond this to ensure community involvement. The VECs have not even been convened for more than a year though, as reported by the primary schoolteachers, they *have* merely been constituted. Where EGS schools are concerned, the committees have not even been constituted. There is thus a dichotomy here. While conceptually there is an understanding of the importance of community involvement and participation, and it is emphasised in the objectives, in the actual plans and their implementation, the community is left out. This has set up many unhealthy trends, which will prove disruptive in the long run, particularly where issues like equity are concerned. Without effective community control, which would mean participation by women, as also members of SC, ST and other minority groups, teachers' biases would go unchecked, resulting in escalating the disadvantages already accruing to girls and children of particular communities.

What is also lacking in the panchayats is an effective outreach campaign to motivate community elders and parents regarding the benefits of educating their children. However, this cannot be achieved in a vacuum, as it is a commonly established fact that low earnings retard the demand for education. Thus the creation of motivation for education needs to be contextualised within the larger economic regeneration of the society, where children and parents alike can be inspired to aspire for the best—where their world is not limited by the relentless assault of poverty and social strife.

UNEXPLORED QUESTIONS

Given the restrictions of time as well as the fact that they are more in the nature of rapid assessments, there are some obvious limitations to qualitative micro studies. Further, the lack of quantitative data available at the panchayat level has further limited the study to being primarily anecdotal and based on impressions, creating a not-so-firm basis from which to generalise about DPEP in Chhattisgarh. The lack of a historical context is yet another limitation. Although DPEP cannot be burdened with the task of eliminating the social and economic baggage of discrimination that defines the existence of tribal communities in India, it needs to be explored how this particular legacy is impacting upon DPEP's performance in relation to the ST community. One cannot help wondering what the SC and OBC communities (who have greatly benefited from EGS schools) did before 1997? In village 'A', the sarpanch and one of the BRC resource persons had studied in the GPS. At that time, it was obviously a functioning school. Though we cannot vouch for accuracy, several educated men stated that the GPS started declining in quality over the years (they blamed it on disinterested teachers). They saw in the EGS an opportunity to get an alternative school in the OBC hamlet, and when their children moved out of the primary school in 1997, it started deteriorating. Its fate was more or less sealed after the headmaster retired in June 2000.

The government schools under discussion have local teachers drawn from the tribal community. Yet, this has not improved their performance. During focus-group discussions a few people (including a local resident who is a BRC resource person) admitted that they were not in a position to exert pressure as they have extended community/family linkages. Alcoholism is known to be a big social problem in many tribal areas, and some community leaders blamed the school's deterioration on this. However, it is not possible to make any definitive comment/statement in the absence of a more detailed study. The unfortunate situation is that, notwithstanding the EGS programme, many tribal groups continue to have little access to primary education and the fact that this is also true in Chhattisgarh, a tribal dominated state, requires to be addressed by DPEP.

NOTES

1. We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Aarti Saihjee and Vimala Ramachandran in editing and substantially rewriting the field notes in the form of a case study.
2. These numbers have been excerpted from Nambissan (2000).
3. Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti, Bhopal.
4. It is a tribal majority area and hence falls under the purview of Schedule VI in which provision is made for the establishment of autonomous district councils, which can make laws for the management of land and forest, shifting cultivation, appointment of chiefs, inheritance of property, marriage and divorce, social customs and anything related to village administration.
5. The panchayat was a recent breakaway from a larger panchayat, and hardly has any records of its own. It was difficult to get details of the population and literacy figures. It was only with great difficulty that the team could even get an idea of the different hamlets and their demographic composition, and the total population figures. Only the overall population figures were available for the village.
6. The exact figures could not be ascertained due to lack of data available locally with the panchayat or at the block level.

IO THE HIDDEN PICTURE:

A CASE STUDY FROM HISAR DISTRICT, HARYANA

Vandana Mahajan

Whenever I see boys and girls catching the local bus to go to the town's college, there is an ache in my heart that I am not one of them.

—A teenaged girl who dropped out of school in class IV

Why do children from the families of zamindars (landlords) go to private schools?

More attention is given to them and the studies are good in the private school.

—Children in the Government Primary School (GPS)

We would like to study because if I drop out then my parents will push me to become a pali (a form of agricultural child labour).

—SC community boys in class V of GPS, Haryana

I'll take up anything that comes my way (Koi bhi chota-mota kaam mil jaye).

—Three male students of class V in GPS, Haryana, on their aspirations for the future

Hearing these voices brings alive the conflict and chasm between what is and what ought to be in our educational system. What is it that these children are communicating? Living as they do in a differentially rewarding and differentially aspiring world, they are aware of the reality of a highly

stratified society from a very young age. The children's responses quoted above are steeped in gender and social differences. They also reinforce the notion that education and schools are seen as another idiom and place to promote the status quo and to accept the unequal and unjust hierarchy of classes, caste groups and sexes.

Juxtaposing the voices of these, and millions of similarly placed children, with the latest census by the NFHS, 1994 and the NSSO figures of educational achievements, makes for a challenging puzzle. The bigger picture of universalisation in elementary education has never looked more positive and promising than today, with significant decadal jumps in gross enrolment, access and retention rates across regions, sexes, social groups and special focus groups.

The NPE (GOI 1986) or 'Education for All' or 'Bringing Girls Centre-stage' (DPEP 2000j) or 'Making a Difference' (DPEP 2000e)—these and countless other sensitively produced and well-researched documents and policy pronouncements have served well as tools to clearly map the achievements and gaps in the education of girls, and socially deprived and vulnerable sections of society. But perhaps what is needed is a more textured and analytical understanding of issues related to gender and social differentiation inside the classroom, in teacher training, in educational administration and in the community and family/kinship contexts.

THE STATE OF HARYANA

Haryana, a small state located in north-western India, contains just 2 per cent of the country's population and covers 1.34 per cent of its area. According to the latest NSSO's survey (55th Round, 1999–2000) poverty levels in rural Haryana declined sharply from 30.52 per cent in 1993–94 to 14.86 per cent in 1999–2000 (Sundaram 2001). Gross literacy levels in Haryana have also gone up significantly during the decade 1991–2001 (GOI 2001b). The problems of Haryana, incidentally, lie hidden behind the impressive facade created by such figures of linear growth and progress.

Haryana has benefited most by the Green Revolution (apart from Punjab, of course) in the 1960s but it is also a region in which socio-cultural movements have been conspicuous by their absence. Consequently, it is the women in Haryana who suffer more acutely from the problems created by both social underdevelopment and economic prosperity. As in other prosperous states in India, women are numerically

scarcer in Haryana. The gender gap in literacy between men and women in Haryana is about as high as in states that have come to be derogatorily called BIMARU (meaning sickly but also an acronym for Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh). The sex ratio in Haryana is 861 women to 1,000 men, which makes it the lowest among the major states of India. According to the 2001 Census, the sex ratio in Haryana declined further in the decade 1991–2001, as it did in the more prosperous provinces of India. In Punjab, during the previous decade, the sex ratio declined from 882 to 874, in Maharashtra from 934 to 922, in Gujarat from 934 to 921, and in Haryana from 865 to 861 (*ibid.*: 92, 94).

Literacy is very asymmetrically distributed among the sexes in Haryana. Compared to the literacy figure of 79.25 per cent for men in 2001, the corresponding figure of women in Haryana is 56.31 per cent. This places the gender gap in literacy levels of Haryana at almost 23 per cent, which is higher than the national average of 21.68 per cent, and is more akin to that of the BIMARU states. According to the 2001 Census, the corresponding gap in literacy levels between men and women is 26.75 per cent, in Madhya Pradesh it is 26.52 per cent, in Rajasthan it is 32.12 per cent and in Uttar Pradesh it is 27.25 per cent. This gender gap in literacy, again according to the 2001 Census, is the lowest in Kerala (6.34 per cent) whereas at 12 per cent in Punjab it is almost half of what it is in Haryana. The gap stands at 18.75 per cent in Maharashtra (*ibid.*: 126).

TABLE 10.1
Literacy and sex ratio profiles of the state, district and the village

<i>Literacy (7+, 2001)</i>	<i>Haryana</i>	<i>Hisar</i>	<i>The village</i>
Female literacy	56.31%	52.1%	35.8%
Male literacy	79.25%	65.9%(All)	47.8%
Sex ratio—all ages	861	NA	(M 2,075; F 1,883)
Sex ratio—0–6	820	830	(M 352; F 274)

Caste is a unique form of social stratification in India and its geographical spread covers the entire country. But the hold of casteism, or the ideology that members of one caste have similar socio-cultural and politico-economic interests, appears to be more deep-rooted in Haryana than elsewhere. In other places, the last refuge of the caste system is politics. In Haryana, however, caste is nurtured in the family, and schools/colleges founded by caste bodies provide it a veneer of respectability. The educated look up to caste associations/leaders for recognition and consequently, caste blossoms in every institution of Haryana (and not just in its politics).

Most members of the dalit or lowest castes live in villages but they do not own land and therefore survive as landless workers. Studying the unequal scholastic achievements of children from different social classes, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) found that such achievement was not just dependent on the natural aptitudes of learners or government investment but was critically influenced by the quantum of leisure available, traditions of learning, acquisition of academic qualifications and participation in genteel professions by families that are the source of transmitting 'cultural capital'. The spread of education among SC families has been disparate because they are bereft of what Bourdieu calls 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1986: 241–58). Casteism among these powerless people is also not likely to benefit them because, as the saying goes, 'When two sadhus rub shoulders only ashes will fall.' So, even for just 'getting by' in life, most members of these lowest castes are heavily dependent on government help.

THE VILLAGE PROFILE

The village selected for this micro study is from one of the 11 blocks in the Hisar district. It has a high percentage of SC population and is situated in what is primarily an agrarian belt with very little industrialisation. However, of late, a few big industries have set up their plants after the bifurcation of the district into Hisar and Fatehabad. The region is well fed with rivers and canals, and cash crops of cotton and wheat are grown in abundance here.

Like most villages in Haryana, this village is well connected by road, public transport and telecommunications. All households have an electricity connection. Piped drinking water supply is available to those families living on the outer circle of the village, meaning thereby that the piped water is not uniformly accessible to all, especially to poor households.

According to the 2001 Census, the total population of the village is 3,958, with 1,883 females to 2,075 males. Children in the 0–6 years age-group number 626, with the female to male ratio being 274:352. Population figures for the 6–11 years and the 12–14 years age-groups were not available from the village census data. However, the school records for 6–11 years age-group provided an approximate figure of 471 children (208 girls and 263 boys).¹

The sex ratio in the village for all ages and for the 0–6 years age-group matches with the state's and district's declining graph of female population.

There is a difference of 192 females in the village population of 3,958. The missing numbers are not explained either by the in-migration of male agricultural labourers or by the out-migration of families. Due to the availability of plenty of agricultural work in the village itself, the latter phenomenon is not common here. Reasons for this alarming trend thus have to be looked for in the historical, social and cultural contexts of Haryana, where there is a clear pattern of deep-rooted discrimination against women and girls. Female foeticide, domestic violence, dowry deaths and harassment, caste-based oppression and cultural restrictions on women's access to educational and health opportunities are some of the well-documented and commented aspects of gender oppression prevalent in all the socio-economic sections of Haryana.²

The social profile of the village shows that the SC community comprises approximately 55 per cent of the total village population; 40 per cent belong to the General Categories (GC) and 5 per cent are BC. Among the SCs, Chamars are the most numerous and Balmikis, Mazhabi Sikhs, Bazigars and Od follow in decreasing order of numeric presence. Among the GCs, the Jat and Bagdi Sikhs, Bishnoi and Mehtas (Punjabi Banias) comprise the influential and landed communities of the village. And among the BC Nais, Kumhars and Kamboj are the resident communities.

Agricultural labour (both tenurial and contractual) is the main occupation of SC communities, though there are some government employees among the Chamar families. About 50 per cent of the Chamars own small landholdings of between one and three acres. The rest, along with other SC communities, are landless. The average landholding size of the FC communities is between 25 and 30 acres, with a maximum of 150 acres. The percentage of government employment is also higher among the FCs.

An estimate of average household income among SCs and FCs was not collected, but it was clear from field observations and group discussions that there are no families living in abject poverty. All households live in pucca houses and each owns at least one cycle and a few milch cattle. It was reported that agricultural labourers get an average of 125 to 150 days of agricultural wage-work in the village itself. During wheat harvesting and cotton picking seasons, wages are as high as Rs 100 to Rs 150 a day. Interestingly, official records of this village show that 259 families have been issued below poverty line (BPL) cards. However, the process of allotting the BPL cards is highly circumspect, and is mainly used by influential members of the gram panchayat as a tool for appeasement and extracting political gain.

EDUCATIONAL PROFILE

It was reported that 992 men and 676 women are literate in the village. The total literacy rate is thus 42.14 per cent, with male literacy accounting for 47.8 per cent and female literacy for 35.8 per cent. Given that this village has a significant SC population and that most of the children in the 6–18 years age-group are first-generation learners, this is perhaps an accurate figure. This data was taken from the notebook of the census enumerator (see Table 10.2).

An overview of educational facilities shows that the village enjoys a privileged position in the availability of educational facilities for all children up to 16 years. Senior secondary schools and colleges are also within a radius of two to five kilometres and are well connected by bus (in Haryana,

TABLE 10.2
Profile of the educational facilities in the village

<i>Nature of educational facility</i>	<i>Number/Location</i>	<i>Year of establishment</i>
Anganwadi centre	3 (all are situated at one place near the village bus stop on the main approach road)	Running for over 10 to 15 years
Government Primary School (GPS)	1 (on the main approach road to the village)	1964
Government secondary school	1 (GPS and the high school are located in the same campus)	1968 (middle) 1981 (secondary)
Alternative School/ Centre (AS)	2 (one in the house of the FC family for the children of Bazigars and Chamars [both SC], and the second in the panchayat building of the SC community for children of Mazhabi Sikh and Balmiki [SC] communities)	1998–99
Private, unaided and unrecognised schools	4 (three located in the FC dominated areas and the fourth on the outskirts in the premises of a factory)	One is more than 10 years old. Rest were opened in the last two to seven years.

transport in state buses is free for girls along with free education and other incentives).

Yet, in the latest census, the comparative growth rate in literacy, both for the state of Haryana in general and Hisar district in particular, has not improved significantly. Hisar is a phase I district under DPEP. Low literacy figures of the village show that there are significant area-specific variations in development indicators. Despite a good educational infrastructure in the village and at the block level, the tilt against literacy for women and girls remains very sharp. Reasons for such variations need to be looked at within the local social, economical and political contexts (see Table 10.3).

TABLE 10.3
Overview of the primary school facilities

<i>Facilities</i>	<i>GPS</i>	<i>AS</i>	<i>Private schools</i>
Building	Pucca	1. Pucca 2. Inside the teacher's house	Pucca
Classes	Classes I-V with the class III having two sections	I-III	I-V; one is middle and the other a high school
Rooms	4 and one head teacher's office and a covered veranda	1	Insufficient classrooms in all the private schools
Co-educational	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. of teachers	6 (including the head teacher and one contract teacher)	One in each AS	No. of teachers vary from four to six in each school
Multi-grade teaching	No	Yes	No
Basic TLM (blackboards, chalk, mats)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Midday meal	No (although requirements are sent every month)	No	No
Library	Yes	No	No
Drinking water	Yes (hand pump)	Yes (hand pump)	Yes (hand pump)
Toilets	Yes	No	Yes, but inadequate

SCHOOL ENROLMENT AND RETENTION AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL

There is near universal enrolment of children in the 6–11 year age-group. Officially, there are only 17 children who are out of school. Easy access, and sufficient and improved school infrastructure, have contributed to overall improvement in the village. Economic constraints per se also do not affect children's enrolment at the primary level. Although the majority of SCs are landless, extreme economic deprivation is not evident. Reasons for dropping out are primarily seasonal out-migration of families of landless agricultural labourers and discriminatory social practices vis-à-vis girl children (see Tables 10.4 and 10.5).

TABLE 10.4
Class I enrolment in GPS, 1996–97, 2000–01 and 2001–02

Year	Total		SC		BC		FC	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
1996–97	26	21	19	15	–	–	7	6
2000–01	29	24	22	21	–	–	7	3
2001–02	29	27	28	27	–	–	1	–

TABLE 10.5
Class I enrolment in one private school,
1997–98, 1998–99 and 2001–02

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1997–98	7	3	10
1998–99	14	12	26
2001–02	22	12	34

During the last five years, enrolment in class I of the GPS has remained stable, hovering between 53 to 59 children per year; the enrolment ratio of girls to boys is around 47:49. Enrolment of children from the SC community is steadily increasing in the GPS. Inversely the enrolment of FC children is decreasing in the same school (see Table 10.6).

Enrolment in private schools shows the exclusivity of their children in terms of social status. It also reflects a huge gender divide. While the village has an almost equal ratio of SC to OBC and FC population, more than 90 per cent of children in the GPS are from the SC community and

TABLE 10.6
Comparative table of total enrolment
in classes I to V in 2001-02

School	Boys	Girls	Total
GPS	152	144	296
4 Private Schools	216	132	348

more than 90 per cent of children going to private school are from OBC and FCs. Enrolment in the fee-charging private schools—there are four in the village—has steadily increased in the last five years. Gender bias in favour of boys in the private schools is particularly sharp (see Table 10.7).

TABLE 10.7
Comparative break-up by SC, OBC and FCs from
classes I to V in GPS and one private school, 2001-02

School	Class I			Class II			Class III			Class IV			Class V		
	SC	Oth	T	SC	Oth	T	SC	Oth	T	SC	Oth	T	SC	Oth	T
Boys															
GPS	26	3	29	26	10	36	23	10	33	22	6	28	11	15	26
Pvt. school	6	16	22	2	14	16	2	12	14	2	8	10	1	18	19
Girls³															
GPS	27	-	27	22	4	26	29	7	36	28	9	37	16	2	18
Pvt. school	4	8	12	1	8	9	3	7	10	1	7	8	1	7	8
Total															
GPS	53	3	56	48	14	62	52	17	69	50	15	65	27	17	44
Pvt. school	10	24	34	3	22	25	5	19	24	3	15	18	2	25	27

A glance at the transition figures from classes I to V also show gender discrimination against girls. More boys have progressed from class I to V than girls in both the GPS and the private schools.

COHORT ANALYSIS

Based on the cohort study of the 1997-98 batch of GPS students, there is a net dropout rate of approximately 23.70 per cent at class V. This does not include children who have taken admission in private schools after obtaining a transfer certificate (TC) from the GPS. They form about 15.30 per cent of the cohort. Interestingly, out of six FC children who were enrolled in class I, five left the GPS to take admission in the private

schools of the village. One has continued to study in the GPS.⁴ Another 16 per cent have been detained in classes III and IV due to poor performance.

According to the above estimate, in 2001–02, 46 per cent children have transited to class V from the batch of 1997–98. Disaggregated figures on the basis of girls' and boys' participation show that more girls drop out than boys, although in percentage terms the dropout rate differs by only 1 per cent. The difference is more obvious when the GER of boys and girls in class I is compared. There were 37 boys to 22 girls enrolled in the batch of 1997–98. The cohort analysis shows that 33 per cent of girls and 67 per cent boys have transited to class V. While the percentage of female detainees is 60, it is 40 for the boys.

Another significant feature of the cohort analysis is the trend of detention and fresh admissions in each class at the primary level. Maximum retention and admission of new children takes place at class III. As many as 11 children were found to be detainees from the class III attendance register of the 1997–98 batch and there were 10 new admissions in that year. In all, there were 28 detainees till class IV in the cohort of 1993. There were 16 new admissions in classes III and IV.

The analysis of a random sample of 10 per cent of the cohort group that joined class I in 1997–98 reveals that of the six children, all of whom were from the SC community, only one boy is now in class V.⁵ Two were detained in classes II and III, another two left the GPS and joined the private school and one left in class II. In the last case, the boy took a TC because his family was migrating to another village; however, it is not certain whether he was admitted in another school. Although this sample of enrolment and retention records of the village GPS may not be statistically sound, it mirrors the larger picture in the primary stage. It also captures the pull of private schools and the persistence of gender and social divide in the choice of school.

The analysis also raises concern about the significant dropout rate at the class V level, even in a well-functioning school. Disaggregated data shows a sharper decline in the participation of girls from poor communities.⁶ Although there are fresh admissions in all the classes at the primary level, the number of children at the class V level remains about 50 per cent of the number enrolled in class I. The rest are either detained in classes III, IV and V (even though existing information in cohort studies only captures the trend up to entry in class V, however, discussions with teachers and children reveal that children do repeat class V) or drop out/leave the school and seek admission elsewhere.

Gender and community based differences become more evident in the upper primary and secondary level of schooling in the village. More boys and girls from the SC community dropped out from classes IX and X (see Table 10.8).

TABLE 10.8
Enrolment in the government high school, attached to the GPS, 2001-02

Class	Total		SC		Others	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
VI	41	19	31	14	10	5
VII	25	21	19	17	6	4
VIII	28	4	18	3	10	1
IX	26	15	8	9	18	6
X*	44	27	19	8	25	19

Note: * The sudden increase in class X is attributed to fresh admissions for class X examinations from private schools. Apparently, on producing an affidavit of age and schooling, students can be admitted to class X to take the board (public) examination (see Table 10.9).

The cohort analysis (see Table 10.9) of the class VI batch of 1996-97 shows that 41 per cent boys and 22 per cent girls reached class X and the pass percentage in class X of this batch was 37.6 per cent. The maximum dropouts and failures occurred in classes VI and VII.

TABLE 10.9
Transition of class VI batch of 1996-97
who completed class X in 2000-01

Class	Boys	Girls	Total
VI	34	9	43
VII	24	4	28
VIII	14	3	17
IX	14	2	16
X	14	2	16

OVERALL OBSERVATIONS

ADEQUACY OF ACCESS AND FUNCTIONING OF THE SCHOOLS

The GPS in the village seems to be functioning well. DPEP interventions on in-service training inputs to all the teachers, efficient MIS, placement

of contract teachers (to augment Student-teacher Ratio [STR]), building an additional room with VEC funds, introduction of new activity-based textbooks up to class IV, and a limited but functional library have definitely added value to the functioning and efficiency of the GPS. These improvements need to be viewed keeping in mind that until 1995, this was a single-teacher school. Its efficient functioning could perhaps also be attributed to the fact that five of the six teachers are from the same panchayat, four of them belong to the SC community, the coordinators of the BRC and CRC live in the same village and the CRC functions from the GPS.

The teachers' association with the school is also very positive. All of them referred proudly to their school as the model school of their block. The opinion of parents and children regarding the functioning of the school was equally favourable. When we visited the school, it was buzzing with activities and the presence of about 300 enthusiastic children lent a general 'feel good' atmosphere to the place. School records show an above-average attendance pattern. Of course, the fact that the GPS is located in the secondary school premises is an added advantage.

Yet, people with resources and higher social status in the village clearly prefer private schools, even though these compare poorly with the GPS in terms of facilities, infrastructure and teacher competence. Parents' bias in favour of private schools in Haryana has been explored at great length in Yash Aggarwal's study on the unrecognised private schools of Haryana (Aggarwal 2000c). According to him, people with increasing levels of disposable income are shifting to private schools because they perceive them to be efficient and of good quality. An added factor is the importance they place on learning English. However, there is also some evidence of children (both SC and GC) rejoining the GPS after a few years in a private school. This could be attributed to the better functioning of the GPS, especially in terms of infrastructure and an improved STR. Ultimately, given that most of the private schools are unrecognised, children have to come to the GPS to take the board exams in classes V and X.

With its present strength of six teachers and basic minimum infrastructure, the village GPS would not be able to cope if it gave admission to all the village children in the 6–11 year age-group. Near-universal access to schooling in the village has been made possible only because there are four private schools. This possibly strengthens the popular perception that government schools cannot reach out to all children in an equitable, effective and efficient manner and at the same time assure quality.

Though there is near-total gender and social parity in enrolment and attendance for the 6–11 year age-group, the issue of ensuring access to dropouts and never-enrolled children in the slightly older age-group of 8–14 years remains untackled. There are many more girls than boys in this age-group, both of whom are currently engaged in a variety of domestic chores and low-paying agricultural work. These children are exclusively from the SC category, particularly the poorest of them, who in this village belong to the Bazigar, Balmiki and Thori communities. No survey has been undertaken to identify out-of-school children, nor have any strategies been evolved to bring these children into the educational fold. Officially, there are 17 children who are out of school, but it is not clear whether they only comprise children at the school entry age or all children in the 6–14 range. A visit to the SC mohallas clearly showed that the number of children who had dropped out at the primary level was definitely larger than reflected in the school records.

Accessing disabled children seems to be a non-issue in terms of acknowledging them as a special category. There is one female and four male disabled children in the 6–14 year age-group studying in the GPS. Though the school records do reflect the number of disabled children enrolled, they do not cover the total number of such children in the village.

As mentioned earlier, the quality of private schools leaves much to be desired. Since these schools are very clearly business enterprises, issues related to learning and children's scholastic achievements take a backseat. They are busy wooing parents by offering free items (ties and shoes), the promise of teaching children English and extensive door-to-door publicity. In the absence of any regulatory and accountability mechanisms, the growth, sub-standard infrastructure and the indifferent academic quality of private schools in Haryana remain unchecked. In this village, the three private schools that have opened up in the last seven years have more children enrolled in them than the GPS.

The quality of AS in the village is also extremely unsatisfactory. One AS meant for the Bazigar and Chamar hamlets is run by a Mehta (FC) caste educated woman in her own house, though the communities that this school serves live either on the periphery or in a different hamlet of the village. When the teacher accompanied the research team to the Bazigar locality, she confessed that this was the first time she had 'stepped into' that locality. The other AS run within the SC habitation is slightly better, though the teacher there also comes from a FC. In both AS centres, the majority of children present during our visit were in the 3–6 year age-group, and should actually have been in anganwadi centres. The Assistant

Project Officer (APO) at the district level himself was of the opinion that most of the AS centres in the district are not functioning well. The decision to open an AS centre is an ad hoc one, as is the selection of AS teachers—both seem to be dependent on local socio-political factors. Be that as it may, what is very clear is that AS centres definitely do not function as a needs-based strategy to access out-of-school children in difficult circumstances.

QUALITY ISSUES

There is an immediate need to address the issue of relatively poor transition and completion rates from class I to class V in the village GPS, which otherwise has the requisite conditions to qualify as a good school. Significant retention rates bring into focus the hidden and/or understated issues of quality of teaching-learning processes, teachers' attitudes to children's learning and their life context, as well as evaluation procedures and criterion. Similarly, dropout rates point to the need to look at both classroom issues and the persistent social and economic compulsions of poor children. It is obvious from the cohort analysis that those who can exercise the option of sending their children to another (private) school (which may be the second-best option) do so rather quickly, and leave behind a trail of clues and questions regarding the efficiency of the GPS.

It is important to note that lack of quality impacts girls much more than boys because of their vulnerability and continued struggle against odds to come to school. Higher retention and dropout rates amongst them clearly bring out this fact.

HIERARCHIES OF ACCESS AND THE DUAL SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

There is a clear divide in the village regarding who goes to which school. The choice of school is determined by the socio-economic status of the family. Four types of choices regarding schooling emerged from the village study. A few children from rich, landowning, FC families do not attend any school in the village, but go to the nearest town, where most of these families also have a house. These schools are called 'convent' schools and all subjects are taught in the English medium. These parents have little stake in ensuring the quality of the village schools. It was also observed that most of them are well educated and employed in the government or

private sector. They also own land in the village. Many children from these families continue to study up to the college level. Girls from the educated, FC, Mehta and Bishnoi families were seen to be studying in the colleges of the nearby town.

A large proportion of the FC communities, especially the Jat Sikhs, send their children to the four private schools in the village. As has been pointed out earlier, these are English-teaching schools, with nursery sections. The families of children who go to private schools are essentially in the agricultural sector who employ agricultural labourers for ongoing work. Some of them employ children as *pali*, (children who are given on contract by the parents on payment of a fixed amount of money or in lieu of loans taken by them from the landlord). It is interesting to note that more boys than girls from landed families go to the private school and very few show any inclination to allow their children, boys and girls, to pursue education beyond class X or XII. Boys are expected to join their father in farming and girls are married off between 16–18 years of age.

There is a third category comprising SC children who go to the village GPS. These children are mainly from first-generation learner families and their parents are agricultural labourers. They have rarely been able to study beyond X or XII. Girls are the first to be withdrawn. Very few boys and even fewer girls (two in this village) from educated and service class SC families manage to go in for higher studies.

The fourth category of children comprises those who attend the AS. These are children from the most deprived families who have either dropped out in class I or II, or have never been enrolled. Some of the boys enrolled in AS centres continue to work as child labour, as *pali* (see section on social equity issues later in this chapter), and the girls work as domestic helpers along with their mothers.

Discussions with the community members, children and teachers on the plurality of the education system showed a clear segregation along class and caste lines. Their opinion was that private schools are for zamindars and those who have the money to pay for the school fee, uniform and textbooks. Although the GPS teachers did not have good opinion of the functioning and achievements of private schools, they accepted their existence and mushrooming growth unquestioningly.

A review of the differential aspirations and expectations of children in the GPS and the private schools shows that they view private schools as vehicles for upward mobility and promoting meritocracy. Studying in private schools, they believe, will allow them to do better and give them a competitive edge. 'There is more discipline and attention given in private

schools.' 'Computer and English education is taught there and children are prepared to succeed in Board examinations.' These responses clearly bracket private schools with superior social and performance status.

The growth of private schools has not only led to social differentiation but has also widened the gender divide. There was 40 per cent more enrolment of boys than girls in the private schools. Families from the SC community, who preferred the private school, were primarily sending their boys to them.

CLASSROOM ISSUES

Classroom processes in both GPS and the private schools in the village continue to operate within traditional hierarchical structures in which the teacher has absolute authority. Scolding, punishing or beating the children, asking questions and seeking responses, giving instructions, the use of textbooks, the body language of both teachers and children—all these factors clearly show differential patterns of behaviour vis-à-vis girls and boys, poor performers and high achievers, the bright and the shy, neatly dressed and poorly dressed children and SC and FC children.

GENDER ISSUES

Enrolment and participation (including attendance) of girls in this village up to class V compares well with the boys, though it is not equal. In classes IV and V, the proportion of girls to boys is not skewed. While there are fewer girls in class V, there is a decline in the number of boys as well. This seems to confirm the overall trend depicted in the DPEP data for Haryana.

Gender issues, especially inside the classroom, continue to be problematic. Teachers' attitudes towards girls, evident from classroom observations, reinforce stereotypes and traditional roles. The several micro studies done in this area, including those by NIEPA, do explore gender issues but only in terms of participation; there is no focus on gender stereotypes or roles. Sensitivity to such gender issues was also lacking among people the research team interacted with. For example:

- Inside the classroom, even though their numbers are almost equal, boys sit in three rows (getting more space) while the girls huddle together in just two rows.

- The girls seem to do all the mundane chores, like serving water or fetching and making tea for the teachers (and visitors).
- In a lesson on simple and complex machines, questions on sewing machines were addressed to the girls, while the boys were questioned on the operation of the ceiling fan and machines used to mow grass.
- During our discussions with the children, the girls said that teachers 'scold the girls more but punish (including beat) the boys more.'
- Both male and female teachers give the boys more attention.
- There is no space either within or outside the classroom for cooperation and healthy interaction between boys and girls—even the games they play are different. During school events, the items presented are organised separately for boys and girls.
- There is a strong undercurrent of rivalry between girls and boys, with the latter showing a tendency to put down girls and 'girlish' traits. According to the boys, they do better in exams than girls, they outnumber the girls and even class monitors are usually selected from among them. When asked to contest these points, the girls attempted a weak protest but were out-shouted by the boys. In class V, boys derisively mentioned that there is a corner row of girls in their class, which they called *kabaad* because they are poor performers and the teacher has asked them to sit in a separate row.

Aren't these issues important enough to merit a closer look at gender inequilibrium within classroom processes? Aren't these perceptions and attitudes clear indicators of discrimination against the girls, which definitely sets them back in terms of confidence and self-esteem?

Gender roles are very sharply etched in the minds of these children. When asked whether they would like to exchange their gender roles with the girls, the boys instantly responded with a roar of denial. On the other hand, more than 50 per cent of the girls were ready to switch roles. According to the boys, 'Girls have to do much more household work as well as look after younger siblings.' Girls, on the other hand, said that if they switched roles, 'We'll have the freedom to go out'; 'We can dress in trousers and shirt'; 'We'll have less work to do'; 'I won't need to plait my hair and put ribbons in it.'

During discussions with the girls and their mothers, it was more than evident that the girls have a very strong desire to study. One mother's rationale for educating the girls was, 'If our daughters are educated, then they won't need to work as domestic servants in the homes of richer people.' However, very few girls in the village from poorer communities

have studied beyond class X. There was not a single girl from the Mazhabi Sikh and Bazigar community who has studied beyond class VIII. This is despite the fact that the village GPS is up to class X and the nearest Senior Secondary School, which is only 2 kilometres away, is well connected by road and buses.

Notwithstanding the general economic prosperity of the state, government incentive schemes for girls' education right up to the college level and good infrastructure (roads, transport, number of colleges, etc.), higher education for girls remain a largely unachieved target in Haryana. The early marriage of girls, preference for boys, dowry and purdah are some of the well-known factors that impact negatively on the education of girls.

SOCIAL EQUITY ISSUES

Access, enrolment and retention of children from poor and socially disadvantaged communities have improved significantly in this village. Better performance on these counts is due to their relatively better economic status and DPEP interventions to improve the school infrastructure.

Alongside, there is a clearly visible practice of child labour, which has not been addressed at all by the school, the VEC or CRC and BRC. During discussions with class V boys in GPS, the issue of child labour that is bonded or contracted to local landlords emerged as an important area of concern. Several young boys (in the 11–14 year age-group) are given away as *pali* to landlords on a yearly contract of Rs 3,000 to Rs 5,000 (plus food, some grain and clothes). They are made to do a range of household and farm work. Although the teachers in the GPS were at pains to explain that child labour is no longer a problem in their village, enough circumstantial evidence of its prevalence surfaced during our interactions with and visit to the poorer and SC communities. Two such children that the team met had dropped out in class IV and V respectively. They are now working as full-time farm labourers. According to the Head Teacher's own rough estimate, presently there are about 100 to 150 *palis* in the village. These children are from the SC community and work with landowning GC families in the same village. Children from these GC families are sent to the local private school or a 'convent' school in the nearby town.

Although there is no hard evidence for this, one can surmise that children who drop out between class III and V are likely to end up as child

labour. The teachers tentatively gave us a conservative estimate of three to four children dropping out every year. But they kept qualifying this with the statement that child labour surely is not a problem now. 'Ab sare SC bache eskool aate hain aur pali ka kaam chote bache nahin karte.' ('Now all SC children come to school and young children no longer do the work of palis.')

They also inadvertently revealed their practice of retaining in the attendance registers the names of children who drop out during the wheat-harvesting and cotton-picking seasons, which last for about four to six weeks. Girls are more frequently found to be missing from school at these times.

During the focus-group discussion in the GPS, a question was raised regarding the importance of schooling. The boys' responses were very revealing. They said, 'It is very important to continue to study, otherwise we will also be given away by our parents as pali to work on contract in the landlord's house. We'd have to lift cow-dung, irrigate the field during the night and work through the day. In school it is intellectual work while as a pali it is hard physical labour.'

Though girls from poor and socially disadvantaged families are not given away as pali, they do drop out temporarily during cotton-picking and wheat-harvesting days. There were a large numbers of girls in the adolescent age-group, especially from the Bazigar, Mazhabi Sikh and Balmiki communities, who had dropped out at the primary level to take up household responsibilities while their mothers worked as farm labour. Most of these girls are presently working as domestic helpers in the houses of village zamindars.

Hierarchy of aspirations along gender, caste and community lines, was clearly evident. However, it must be pointed out that our observations here are largely impressionistic. During the focus-group discussion with girls (classes IV and V), it emerged that barring two, the others had no aspirations outside the household domain. One girl wanted to learn tailoring to earn a living and the other said that she wanted to be a teacher. More than half the girls were not sure of studying beyond class VIII, although all of them showed interest in continuing till class X if their families permitted.

Boys were equally short on dreams and hope. With the exception of three boys, most did not desire to study beyond class X. Two of the three were later identified as children from the GC community. Among the different SC groups, boys and girls from the Chamar community were more vocal than children from Bazigar, Od and Mazhabi Sikh

communities. Boys from these communities had lower educational aspirations than those from the numerically and economically visible Chamar community. With the exception of one boy who said that he would like to become a teacher, the rest had very minimal work aspirations and were willing to take up anything that came their way. The most they hoped for was to *not* become a farm labourer.

Interestingly, children studying in private schools (both boys and girls) did not show high educational aspirations either, although more than half the boys and about 30–40 per cent of the girls were desirous of studying up to class XII. The reason given by boys for not opting for college-level education was that they have land to look after and that they were expected by their fathers to join them in the family's agricultural work. Where girls from the GC community are concerned, the strong and widely prevalent social taboos and purdah deter them from aspiring for anything on their own. Education for these girls is seen in utilitarian and instrumental terms to ensure better prospects of finding a groom.

ROLE AND VIEWS OF THE VEC

Seven VEC members (out of 12) came for the discussion meeting with the field study team along with three special invitees. Only two of these seven members had children who were studying in the GPS. The children of the remaining members were either attending the private schools or were below school-going age. They admitted that the VEC does not meet regularly. In this year it has met only once to approve the auctioning of trees that had fallen inside the school campus during a sandstorm.

The VEC restricts its functioning to occasional get-togethers and the celebration of national holidays. School-related issues are not discussed in any village forum, be it the VEC, gram panchayat or gram sabha meeting, or the Village Development Committee.

As per the norms in DPEP Haryana, the VEC of this village should have representation from the SC community, women and two parents whose children study in the GPS. The Head Teacher of the GPS is mandated to be its Member-Secretary. However, in the village under study, the official VEC has been 'replaced' by another committee that has been constituted by the block office of the education department. Membership to this second Village Education Construction Committee (VECC), which has been formed out of the VEC, is actively sought after because of the substantial funds transferred to it for the construction of

the proposed school building. It was quite shocking to see that members of the VEC were openly discussing the possibility of misappropriating these funds in front of the research team.

Thus, though a VEC does exist in this village, it serves primarily as a rubber-stamping authority. According to the members, its functioning and role is limited by the local-level politics of using these bodies to exert influence, extract benefits and distribute patronage. The participation of women members of the VEC was also not evident. Most of its members had no knowledge of their role, nor did they have an inkling of the importance of VEC in addressing issues related to children's education.

However, all the members present at the discussion felt the need to de-politicise bodies such as the VEC, in which participation should be encouraged on a voluntary basis by people who can devote time and energy to the improvement of the school and increasing enrolment. They agreed to get involved with school issues, if the Head Teacher took the initiative of calling regular VEC meetings. In response, the Head Teacher was quick to point out that most members do not attend meetings when they are called.

CONCLUSION

The micro study of the Hisar district in Haryana confirms that, 'Enrolment and retention rates for both boys and girls rise and gender disparity in both respects fall as we move up the scale of the economic status of households. Also, inter-group disparities tend to decline as the average literacy rate increases and the gender gap as well as differences between socially disadvantaged and other caste groups become narrower' (Vaidyanathan and Nair 2001: 28).

It also confirms that inequalities remain hidden in this bigger and better picture of a quantum leap in enrolment and retention rates. The cultural and social barriers faced by the disadvantaged groups in terms of attitudes, perceptions, ignorance and prejudices of the education hierarchy remain unaddressed. Elimination of gender, caste, community and other social biases of the school administration, teachers and the community still remain a big challenge.

Adding to the above mentioned concern is the issue of, 'Who has a stake in improving the school education?' As it emerges from this micro study educational access in Haryana is clearly divided between the private and government run public schools along the caste, class and gender lines.

It is the poor from the disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, who primarily depend on the government schools for their children's education.

Private, unaided and unrecognised schools that are mushrooming in rural Haryana have become a lucrative business enterprise that is widening and deepening social disparities. Looking at it from the historical and political perspective, it seems that a divided system leading to an even more divided society is becoming an almost unchallenged reality (Faust and Nagar 2001). It also suggests a structural dualism where different socio-economic groups are opting for different schools. Until the mid-1980s this was an urban phenomenon, but the Haryana situation shows that it is fast spreading into rural areas. Economically well-off parents prefer to send their children to private schools, which they view as a status symbol and a ticket to vertical mobility.

The historical image of a poorly performing and inadequate state educational system still exercises its influence on the people. Those who can ill afford to send their children to fee-charging private schools also have similar views on government and private schools as that of the well-off sections of the village. The public perception is that private schools offer better-quality education. Even a well-functioning state-run school (as found in the village panchayat under the micro study) ranks lower in popular perception than a sub-standard, poor-quality and high-cost private school. This can be partly explained by the popular image of a private school as an elite institution which provides something extra through its emphasis on English teaching, social finesse and 'modern technological' inputs like computers (even if the school may just have one machine!), as well as by its insistence on an anglicised school uniform with shoes and tie.

The growing popularity of unaided and unrecognised private schools, despite their clear class, caste and gender distinctions, is bound to further demoralise and de-motivate the teachers in state-run schools (Kumar 1995: 59–61). Teaching mostly first-generation learners who are poor and socially disadvantaged and deprived is definitely not a preferred profession or vocation.

The gender dimension of unequal educational opportunities expresses itself in different forms and intensity in the classroom, in the aspirations and self-image of learners, in their access to higher education and in their performance and achievement. The attempt to engender mainstream educational policies, strategies and actors has to be sustained and re-invigorated.

One of the convincing messages that emanates from this study is that more attention needs to be given to quality issues in the school and the classroom, as well as the social contexts that exclude a large number of children (more girls and poor children) from accessing educational opportunities. This study once again emphasises the need for teachers' orientation on qualitative improvement and a greater understanding of the impact of classroom processes on children's achievement, on enhancing the self-esteem of learners and on ensuring social equity. Issues of child labour, early marriage of girls, absenteeism related to seasonal migration and the socio-economic divide in schooling and education require understanding and attention from the educational bureaucracy, teachers and the VEC.

The functioning and effectiveness of new structures and bodies such as the VEC, is largely dependent on a range of political and social factors. An understanding of these will enable us to assess the potential of such decentralised bodies to contribute to primary education. Their role has to be viewed in the context of the importance of school-community inter-links to redress the power and equity equilibrium.

In conclusion, it is evident that lack of any regulatory mechanisms has led to the perpetuation of inequalities in primary education in Haryana. Anyone can open a school and register their students to take the class V examination after furnishing a simple affidavit. As a result, formal recognition by the state government is not a pre-condition for operating educational institutions. This kind of *laissez-faire* in primary education has far-reaching implications for the state of Haryana. When this phenomenon is counter-posed to existing social attitudes and a blatant gender bias, it takes on a totally different hue. Therefore, it may not be out of place to ask whether there is a conscious design by the elite and those in power to encourage a dual system in the state.

NOTES

1. Village Census Enumerator's Notebook.
2. Shubha. *Haryana mein mahilayon ki esthti* (Status of women in Haryana). SEARCH State Resource Centre, Haryana.
3. The number of FC girls is extremely low in all the schools partly because of a low sex ratio in the age-specific population of the village. This is particularly noteworthy among the FCs Bishnoi, Jat Sikhs (Jat) and Mehta (Bania) communities. It is now well documented that sex ratios among the forward communities in Haryana are

particularly skewed against girls. Another reason for the missing FC girls and boys from the village schools can be attributed to their enrolment in the nearby town's 'convent' private schools, which have a transport pick-up facility.

4. The FC student who continues to study is Rahul Mehta. His father, Shyam Lal, is a Physical Training Instructor (PTI) who works in a government school in the neighbouring Mansa district of Punjab. Incidentally, Rahul lives in a joint family and his uncle is the Block Coordinator of DPEP, Ratiya block, Fatehabad district.
5. The student who continues to study is named Sukhwinder Singh. A Chamar by caste, his father is called Desraj and mother is Sonabai. She is a housewife whereas Desraj is a labourer by occupation. The family has a pucca house with an electricity connection. It shifted to this village around 25 years ago because it has more employment opportunities for landless workers like them and also because it happens to be the village to which Desraj's mother belonged. Sukhwinder took a TC in class II, attended a private school but returned to the GPS after a year basically because his parents couldn't afford the tuition fees and other expenses of that private school. They, however, also said that the serious commitment and diligence of the new team of schoolteachers had pulled them back to the GPS. Sukhwinder has a younger brother, Sandeep Kumar, who also studies in the same GPS in class II. In fact, the younger brother is in the class of which the Head Teacher of this school is also the class teacher. So, the younger brother is plied with lots of homework and is reportedly a far more serious student than Sukhwinder. 'This is because the Head Teacher is a very strict man. The fear of being punished by him drives these fellows to work hard. Even I get homework but it does not take me so long finishing it because my teacher takes it easy', explained Sukhwinder.

The main reason why the boys of this poor family have not quit school yet is because they are not doing too badly academically and though their father is illiterate, their mother is well-versed in the letters of the alphabet and numbers thanks to the literacy campaigns conducted in this area.

6. Hardeep Kaur is still remembered as an intelligent student though she stopped coming to school almost two years ago. She is the daughter of Joginder Singh who is a landless labourer and belongs to the Thori (also called Naik) tribe. This girl was admitted in 1997-98 like others in this sample but even while she was among the toppers of her class, she was withdrawn from school by her parents. The reason they advance for this is that the girl is needed for domestic work and attending to her three younger siblings while her father and mother work as attached labour at a landlord's house.

II SECOND-GENERATION ISSUES IN EQUITY AND EDUCATION: LEARNING FROM KOLAR DISTRICT, KARNATAKA

Vani Periodi[†]

According to the Karnataka Human Development Report (Government of Karnataka 1999), only 65 per cent of rural children in the state attend primary school, which is higher than the national average of 63 per cent, yet considerably lower than Kerala's 95 per cent (Government of Karnataka 1999). The state also exhibits considerable internal diversity with regards to education indicators. While Dakshina Kannada has the distinction of being declared the first fully literate district in Karnataka as far back as 1990, Raichur continues to pose a challenge with an overall literacy rate of only 36 per cent in 1991 and 49.5 per cent in 2001. It also had an alarming percentage (24.44 for male, and 29.03 for female) of out-of-school children in the 6–14 age-group in April 2001 (see Table 11.1 and Appendix Table 2.11).

TABLE 11.1
Educational status of DPEP phase I districts, Karnataka

District	7 + Literacy rate, 1991		7 + Literacy rate, 2001		Percentage of population	
	All	Female	All	Female	SC	ST
Kolar	50.5	37.8	63.1	52.8	25.7	6.9
Mandya	48.1	36.7	61.2	51.6	13.8	0.7
Belgaum	53.0	38.7	64.4	52.5	11.4	2.3
Raichur	36.0	27.2	49.5	36.8	17.2	7.8

Source: Aggarwal 2000a.

The DPEP programme in Karnataka was launched in 1994–95 in four districts (Belgaum, Kolar, Raichur and Mandya) with the explicit purpose of increasing enrolment and retention in primary schools and enhancing the quality of primary education in the state. Further, the programme's mandate included a special focus on girls and socially disadvantaged and backward groups (SC and ST). This study, through a specific focus on a single panchayat in Kolar, is a qualitative exploration of the larger DPEP initiative in Karnataka, especially its performance in reaching out to the marginal social groups.

In keeping with the parameter of the larger study, the Kolar district was selected as one of the DPEP phase I districts on the basis of its heterogeneous social composition, which includes FCs as well as OBCs, STs and SCs. The fact that, compared to other districts, Kolar also has the highest SC population (25.7 per cent according to the 1991 Census) puts it in a vantage position to highlight the social equity dimensions of the DPEP initiatives. A similar criterion was adopted to identify the study village of Kallur (fictitious name). We primarily relied upon direct observation, informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, and organised focus-group discussions to collect information. We began the process by identifying the different primary schools across the panchayat and engaging in classroom observation. We carried out focus-group discussion with both boys and girls separately and also interviewed the six teachers. In addition, we had informal discussions with the parents in the evenings and with the youth group and women's groups at night. The findings of the study indicate that far from being self-evident, the social disparities in school achievement are, in actuality, a response to a complex interplay of the multiple social forces of class, region, community, family and the state.

PROFILE OF KALLUR VILLAGE

Kolar is one of the border districts of Karnataka and according to the KHDR (Government of Karnataka 1999), 49 per cent of its population is below the poverty line with a per capita income of Rs 4,961. The literacy rate in the early years of DPEP (1996) was 46 per cent among women and 70.2 per cent among men. The KHDR estimated that 27.2 per cent children were not attending any school (*ibid.*). The April 2001 survey of out-of-school children conducted by the government of Karnataka reveals that the situation has undergone a sea-change—now only 6.83 per cent boys (7.98 SC and 8.66 ST) and 7.99 per cent girls (11.15 SC and 11.46 ST) in the 6–14 age-group are not attending any school. The significant

improvement witnessed in the last five years could be attributed to the performance of DPEP.

Way back in 1988–89, Kolar was shortlisted by the Government of India for inclusion in the Mahila Samakhya Programme and the national project team from GOI made extensive field visits to Kolar.² At that time, school participation rates, especially amongst SC and ST children were indeed worrisome and dysfunctional schools were a major area of concern. Amazingly, just 12 years later, the research team along with the coordinator of this research did not come across any dysfunctional schools. We also found that the roads and transport infrastructure had improved and, despite the poor economic situation, children's participation in schooling has come to be accepted as a norm. Though Kolar has many valuable lessons for the country, given the time constraints, we could not explore all the factors that have contributed to this changed situation.

Kallur village is located in the interior of the district, far from the district headquarters. It is connected by road to other parts of the district and state, and is well served by government buses and private vans. The village has a mixed population, comprising SCs, STs and OBCs—with the Lingayats and Okkaligas being the dominant communities. The total population of Kallur is 1,402, of which 695 (49.5 per cent) are women and 707 (50.5 per cent) are men. The share of SCs in the total population is the highest at 44.5 per cent, followed by OBCs (35.94 per cent) and STs (19.54 per cent) (see Table 11.2). The total number of children in the village in the range of 0–14 years is 365 (193 boys and 172 girls or 52.8 per cent and 47.12 per cent respectively; see Table 11.3). As is common in other villages, Kallur too is spread out in a way such that the upper caste/class people occupy the heart of the village. The SC and ST community live on the periphery, on either side of the village in separate colonies. Most people depend on agriculture and sericulture for their livelihood, and many of them are engaged in daily agricultural wage labour, the going wage rate being Rs 50–60 for men and Rs 30–40 for women.

TABLE 11.2
Demographic profile of Kallur

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
SC	317	307	624
ST	136	138	274
Others	254	250	504
Total	707	695	1,402

Source: Village survey of January 2001.

TABLE 11.3
Children in the age-group of 0-14

	Boys	Girls	Total
0-5 age-group	58	39	97
5-14 age-group	135	133	268
Total (0-14 age-group)	193	172	365

Source: School records and village survey, January 2001.

During the course of our fieldwork it was apparent that the village community as a whole is aware and interested in education. This is tangibly reflected in the primary school infrastructure present in the village as also by the fact that most of the youth in the village are educated. ICDS-run anganwadi centres have been functioning here for the last 15 years, with one situated on the periphery of the village within the SC colony. The anganwadi worker is a local SC woman and only SC children go to this centre. Consistent with national evidence, the pre-school education component is practically non-existent and it is popularly perceived as the 'food centre'. Another pre-school centre called Shishuvihar is run by the gram panchayat and is located in the centre of the village, very close to the Government Higher Primary School (GHPS). This caters to children from OBC and ST families and does not have any nutritional programme.

Primary education facilities in the village include the GHPS and one private lower primary school (up to class V) with a kindergarten attached to it. The former came into being in the late 1970s while the latter was established in 1996 to cater to the growing local need for an 'English-medium' school. It was observed that households that are able to afford the fees, and send their children to the private English-medium school even at the pre-school level. In addition to the schools in the village, some children go to private schools in neighbouring villages and the Kolar town. Private school buses ply in the area to pick up and drop children. A government high school is also located in the village thus ensuring that children do not have to leave the village to study till the high school level.

The infrastructure of the GHPS (see Table 11.4) meets the basic requirements and, compared to schools across the country, is relatively well endowed. There are seven classrooms and a few classes are held in a neighbouring building of the milk co-operative. The school has only one toilet for teachers; children use the fields. There seems to be a distinct absence of awareness among both schoolteachers and the concerned authorities regarding the need for a toilet for children, especially girls in

the 10+ age-group. The teachers said that their priority was to first get a compound wall built because, according to them, it might be difficult to maintain a toilet without it. The school has a small playground—barely enough to hold the morning assembly and a few games. Karnataka distributes weekly dry ration (rice) to the children in the government primary school. However, unlike Andhra Pradesh, this has not led to the enrolment of underage children (see Chapter 12). In comparison to the GHPS, the private school has poor facilities (classrooms are spread over the village in private rented homes and the neighbouring temple) but a better teacher-student ratio. However, despite the poor facilities, parents still have a strong desire to send their children to private schools. This issue is explored in detail in a later section.

TABLE 11.4
Overview of primary school facilities as on 2 August 2001

	GHPS	Private lower primary school
Building structure	Pucca	Pucca* (hired)
No. of classes	I–VII	I–IV
No. of rooms	7	8
Co-educational	Yes	Yes
No. of teachers	11	6
No. of students	263	107
Multi-grade teaching	No	No
Basic TLM (blackboard, chalk, mats)	Yes	Yes
Free rations	Yes**	No
Library	Yes	No
Drinking water	Yes	Yes
Toilets	Yes***	Yes
Playground	Yes****	Yes
Compound wall	No	No

Source: Observation

Notes: * Private LPS does not have own building but is planning to construct one.

** GHPS does not have midday meal but provides 3 kilograms of rice to each child.

*** GHPS has a toilet for teachers. Children go out in the field.

**** GHPS has playground, but is insufficient.

ENROLMENT, ATTENDANCE AND RETENTION

It is evident from Table 11.5 that physical access to school is no longer a problem in Kallur. All children in the village, irrespective of their caste and class background, attend school. Currently there are 238 children in the 6–14 age-group in the village of which 48 per cent are SC, 22 per

TABLE 11.5
Overall profile of children in the 6-14 age-group

Age-group	Total children			Enrolled			Non-enrolled			Dropout		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Overall												
6-7	21	14	35	21	14	35						
7-8	10	20	30	10	20	30						
8-9	17	20	37	17	20	37						
9-10	17	16	33	16	16	32				1		1
10-11	20	17	37	20	17	37						
11-12	15	16	31	14	16	30				1		1
12-13	8	15	23	7	13	20		1	1	1	1	2
13-14	8	4	12	8	4	12						
Total	116	122	238	113	120	233		1	1	3	1	4
Scheduled Caste												
6-7	9	7	16	9	7	16						
7-8	5	13	18	5	13	18						
8-9	7	14	21	7	14	21						
9-10	11	6	17	10	6	16				1	0	1
10-11	10	5	15	10	5	15						
11-12	7	4	11	6	4	10				1	0	1
12-13	6	7	13	5	6	11				1	1	2
13-14	1	2	3	1	2	3						
Total	56	58	114	53	57	110				3	1	4
Scheduled Tribe												
6-7	3	0	3	3	0	3						
7-8	0	4	4	0	4	4						
8-9	4	2	6	4	2	6						
9-10	4	5	9	4	5	9						
10-11	5	6	11	5	6	11						
11-12	5	7	12	5	7	12						
12-13	0	5	5	0	4	4	0	1	1			
13-14	1	1	2	1	1	2						
Total	22	30	52	22	29	51	0	1	1			
Other Backward												
Castes												
6-7	9	7	16	9	7	16						
7-8	5	3	8	5	3	8						
8-9	6	4	10	6	4	10						
9-10	2	5	7	2	5	7						
10-11	5	6	11	5	6	11						
11-12	3	5	8	3	5	8						
12-13	2	3	5	2	3	5						
13-14	6	1	7	6	1	7						
Total	38	34	72	38	35	72						

cent are ST and 30 per cent are OBC. Among them, only four dropouts have been reported among the SC children (three boys and one girl) and only two never-enrolled children, one each in the SC and ST communities—both girls. Interestingly, the reported cases of dropouts are in the 12–13 age-group, indicating that the new trend in dropout seems to be mostly occurring in the later years of or after primary school.

Moving from physical facilities and enrolment to regularity, our survey revealed that most children come to school regularly (see Tables 11.6 and 11.7). While the problem of absenteeism is minimal, it is marginally higher among boys as opposed to girls. During the field visit, almost all the children were present on all four days. This is perhaps a clear indication of the growing awareness of parents and also the regularity of teachers and their ability to motivate children to attend. This trend, however, also needs to be located within the context of what children themselves had to say regarding their enthusiasm for coming to school. Both children and parents said that school provided an escape from the drudgery/pressure of work at home, especially for girls of all age-groups and older boys. They also confessed that they do not like holidays. We make this observation not to undermine the awareness generated in the community but to indicate that this factor may need further exploration.

TABLE 11.6
Attendance profile of class IV children in the previous classes

	Year 1998–99, class I			Year 1999–2000, class II			Year 2000–01, class III		
	227 school days			227 school days			230 school days		
	18 G + 17 B = 35			17 G + 15 B = 32			18 G + 16 B = 34		
	0–75	76–155	156–230	0–75	76–155	156–230	0–75	76–155	156–230
Boys	1	3	13	–	1	14	–	–	16
Girls	1	1	16	–	1	16	–	–	18

Source: School records.

TABLE 11.7
Profile of children enrolled in class I in 1998–99

SC Girls	SC Boys	ST Girls	ST Boys	OBC Girls	OBC Boys	Total
12	9	3	4	3	4	35

Cohort analysis of the current class IV reveals that 35 children (18 girls and 17 boys) joined class I in the year of 1998–99. Two SC boys and one SC girl were detained in this class because of long absenteeism, and

both these children dropped out subsequently. In class II, two SC boys were detained and they too dropped out subsequently. In class III, the batch included two boys who had been detained from the previous batch, as well as one ST boy and one SC girl who joined the school in 2000–01. On the whole, the cohort analysis shows that out of 35 children who joined in 1998–99, two SC girls and three SC boys dropped out and 30 children continued together till class IV or the year 2001–02. Including the two who were detained from the previous batch in class III and the two new entrants in the same class, the total number of children in the current class IV is 34. This clearly indicates that the dropout rate is remarkably low, and that all the dropouts are from the SC community.

We were interested in further exploring why there was a near universal enrolment and retention among primary school children and hence decided to generate an educational profile of parents of the current class IV cohort. We observed that the educational qualification of parents was not very high (see Table 11.8), indicating that most children are first-generation learners. Interestingly, the educational qualification of parents of girl children seems to be slightly higher compared to that of boys' parents. Although, this is too small a sample to state anything conclusively, it does seem to reiterate the larger trend identified in educational research that there is a positive correlation between the education of parents and children's education, especially between the level of the mother's education and that of girl children. When we asked children about their aspirations with regard to education, they were not able to respond with specific answers. They could only make general statements as to the level of education—like SSLC, college, B.A., etc. While children at this age are understandably not expected to decide the future course of their education, here they were not even aware of the educational possibilities. Many girls said that they want to have 'lots and lots' of education—without knowing what it meant.

TABLE 11.8
Educational profile of parents of class IV cohort
(Sample: 16 girls and 15 boys)

<i>Education level</i>	<i>Fathers</i>					<i>Mothers</i>				
	<i>Nil</i>	<i>LPS</i>	<i>HPS</i>	<i>HS</i>	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Nil</i>	<i>LPS</i>	<i>HPS</i>	<i>HS</i>	<i>Graduate</i>
Boys	3	5	4	1	2	5	9	–	–	1
Girls	–	2	1	13	–	6	2	2	6	–

Source: Interviews with children.

INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

The GHPS has 11 teachers, all of whom have completed high school and undergone pre-service teacher training. Since most of them live outside the village, they have to commute to school daily. There are a larger number of male teachers (64 per cent) compared to female teachers (see Table 11.9). There are no complaints from the parents about any of the teachers regarding regularity and punctuality; in fact, they seem to be generally appreciated by the community. Two of the teachers are particularly appreciated for their role in encouraging children's education and parents and community alike are deeply grateful to them. This gratitude is evident across caste groups, and the youth from the SC community claim that it is because of these two teachers that they could achieve higher levels of education. The extent of this appreciation is illustrated by the fact that the panchayat has successfully managed to stall the transfer of one of the two teachers, a feat which is described by the community with a lot of pride. In the teaching and learning process, it is ultimately a 'good teacher' who matters the most.

TABLE 11.9
Profile of teachers

<i>Name—Code</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Caste</i>	<i>Qualification</i>	<i>DPEP training</i>	<i>Residence</i>
SMU	M	OBC	SSLC + TCH	YES	Same village
NSA	F	FC	SSCL + TCH	YES	Nearby town*
VNA	M	SC	PUC + TCH	YES	"
ASP	M	Minority	SSLC + TCH	YES	"
GMN	M	OBC	PUC + TCH	YES	"
KTN	M	SC	SSLC + TCH	YES	"
KMT	M	FC	PUC + TCH	YES	Same village
UDV	F	OBC	PUC + TCH	YES	Nearby Town*
SST	F	OBC	SSLC + TCH	YES	" *
NCG	M	OBC	PUC + TCH	YES	Same village
SBA	F	FC	PUC + TCH	NO	Distant city**

Source: Personal interviews by research team, 2 August 2001.

Notes: * Nearby town is 12 km away from the school and well connected by transport.

** Travels 70 km one way (70 × 2) every day.

Most of the teachers have undergone DPEP teacher training. During interviews, all of them spoke positively about their training experiences and were articulate in explaining the importance and impact of training. The eagerness with which they referred to the TLM led us to expect an

abundance of such materials being actively used in the classrooms. We were shown the room where all the TLM is kept, but could not witness their use in the classrooms. This is not to say that the 'joyful learning', about which DPEP is so insistent, is not visible or practised in the school, but is limited to classes I and II. In the higher classes 'joyfulness' and 'learning' are considered as two discrete processes and, hence, learning is heavily reliant on the age-old method of rote and repetition. Teaching is mostly textbook-based and teachers do not consider 'preparation' to be a necessary prerequisite. Their claim was that since they have been teaching the subjects for several years, they do not need any time to prepare for them. Since the new teaching processes adopted by DPEP necessarily require some amount of planning of and preparation for lessons to be taught, they are not very popular with the teachers. The 'joy' of learning in the classroom is thus limited to occasional songs or storytelling. When it comes to 'learning exercises', teachers revert to a didactic mode with which they are admittedly more comfortable. The use of the library is also limited, and child-centred pedagogy is yet to be internalised and accepted by the teachers. This finding reinforces Vandana Madan's analysis of classroom processes studies in Chapter 6.

It is not surprising, therefore, that beating/caning along with other measures like scolding and punishment, are still the preferred mode of disciplining children. Even if the rod is not used frequently, it is still *the* tool for maintaining control over children. A woman whose daughter was beaten harshly by a teacher (who is male and upper caste) complained to the headmaster with help from her community to ensure that such incidents are not repeated. Boys were very vocal in talking about the different kinds of punishments they experienced—standing on one leg, standing in bent position like a chair, repeatedly sitting down and standing up, slapping each other, etc.

Another medium of control observed in the classroom was the teacher's focus on errors made by children in the learning process. While it is necessary that teachers should help children understand or correct their mistakes, highlighting errors, humiliating the child who made that error, making brighter children spot errors made by others and so on, contribute to the erosion of children's self-esteem. This was visible in all the classrooms we observed. We saw that children who could not pronounce in the dominant dialect (SC children and ST children speak in other dialects/languages at home) were ridiculed by the others, including the teacher.

Teachers relate only to a select number of 'bright' children—those who are good at studies and are active. These children are encouraged to

lead activities and wield power over other students; they are also allowed greater access to teachers. This has resulted in a new pattern of exclusion within the school. Teachers find it convenient to delegate responsibilities in order to reduce their burden. They make the children do all sorts of petty chores like fetching and carrying, tidying up the classroom, etc. We observed no effort to institute a participatory ethos wherein the teachers and children could work together. Notwithstanding these issues identified by parents and children, teachers are still valued by the community—especially the two teachers mentioned earlier. They are *the* pivot around which the school revolves. This could be because of the traditional Indian notion of a teacher as a strict and exacting person who is expected to mould the children. Being of service to the teacher is also accepted as ‘normal’ and parents do not seem to mind if their children are given chores to do.

GENDER EQUITY IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

Teachers, parents and the community at large speak of gender equality as given and emphasise that there is no discrimination in their school. They argue that there has been a discernible change and increasing enrolment, retention and attendance of girls is a case in point. As per DPEP norms, girls and boys are given ‘equal’ opportunities to read, answer questions, etc.—with the teacher making sure he/she asks them in turn. Even though this is practised mechanically and is ritualistic, it is a positive development. The teachers formally apply the same standards and evaluate the academic as well as sports performance of both girls and boys equally.

However, closer scrutiny revealed subtle but deep-rooted gender discrimination operating in the school. Take school chores, for example. Girls sweep and clean, while boys bring tea/coffee from the shop for guests and teachers. Gender discrimination has also insidiously crept into the learning process. Boys are given the responsibility of locking up the school and taking care of keys. They are also given more attention (albeit non-verbal) by teachers. In one instance we observed that, for the entire day, the teacher actually had her back to the girls while speaking to the class. Girls are made to sit at an angle and have thus to make an extra effort to look at the blackboard. In the environmental science class the teacher addressed her explanation on the growth of plants exclusively to the boys. Even when girls stood up to ask questions, the teacher did not respond. In fact, she said, ‘It was enough if boys understood the process.’

Though boys and girls are supposed to sit together, this arrangement is limited to classes I and II. For instance, while playing number games where the children run around and the teacher calls a number, girls and boys are expected to form separate groups. We noticed that at one point when the teacher called out 'five', boys and girls (numbering three and two respectively) hesitated to come together in one group. Nor did the teacher ask them to stand together. We witnessed the same dynamics in class II.

Discussions with children on the issue of discrimination were interesting. The boys (with the exception of two or three) in the group did not even attempt to understand our question. When we asked them whether boys are more intelligent than girls or vice versa, or who needs more education, the answers were always in the negative for girls. Even if one or two answered in favour of equality, their peers immediately teased or taunted them into conforming to the dominant view. Our discussion with girls was far more spirited. They were extremely articulate regarding the 'gendered' expectations of them by their parents and teachers. According to them, even at home when mothers ask boys to help them in their work, they refuse to do so. However, some of the girls did comment that domestic work is a woman's responsibility and they saw no reason why boys should take on this task.

We were particularly concerned with how misplaced pride in being a boy is nurtured in the school. There is no attempt to take into account the larger gender dynamics between boys and girls; instead, dominant attitudes are reinforced. The conscious introduction of 'gender equality' into textbooks also appears to have backfired! For example, a class IV textbook contains the statement; 'Men have no work in the kitchen.' Children are expected to state whether the statement is right or wrong (without any tools to analyse or understand the context in which this question is raised). Here, the subjective attitudes of teachers can effectively undermine the very purpose of such a question.

The ramifications of this were also evident in the larger society where there was a certain resistance to engage with the issues of gender within a more political context. While collecting data, we observed that the number of girls in the age-group of 0-5 in the SC community is 17 compared to boys who are 37. This disparity in sex ratio clearly reflects the systematic bias towards girls (see Chapter 10). We shared this observation with the youth and women's group of the SC community, hoping to initiate a discussion on its possible causes and implications. However, most of the participants gave evasive responses. One retired policeman tried to

provoke the group with comments on the mushrooming of clinics with ultrasound and abortion facilities, but the group maintained a stoic silence.

Despite this resistance to engage with issues of gender, there is an increasing demand for girls' education and this has had a positive impact on raising their age of marriage. The presence of a high school in the village and the community's desire to educate their girl children has at least ensured that now girls get married after high school, while the boys get married after the age of 25. Ironically, the demand for girls' education is inextricably linked with marriage prospects. One common answer that came through the innumerable conversations (with parents, VEC members and even teachers!) was that education was necessary 'to get a better match'. Apparently, there is more demand for educated girls and higher education and possibilities for employment tend to bring down the dowry amount. The only silver lining was that a few women and men said that education was necessary 'to become independent and to understand the outside world'.

SOCIAL EQUITY

More than 90 per cent of the children in the GHPS are from SC and ST communities—and this in itself is seen as being indicative of the absence of caste discrimination. However, like gender, caste politics too manifests itself in subtle social processes. A most obvious source of discrimination is that despite the large numbers of SC children in school, a few upper caste children seem to dominate the classrooms as well as the school. During the morning assembly, it is quite normal to hear teachers shouting at the children, 'Why have you not combed your hair ... if you can't buy oil apply some water and comb ... your father, did he not give you money to cut your hair....' Most of these comments were directed at poor children who also happened to belong to the SC community. Similar practices were visible during our classroom observations. One child from the SC community came to the blackboard for some activity and the teacher shouted at him, 'Look at your shirt, why couldn't you wear something else?' The other children joined in, humiliating the child even further. One child sneered, 'Teacher, he has a new shirt. But he is not wearing it. How dirty it is!' While the other children laughed, one could see the SC child visibly shrink with embarrassment. We were told later that this boy is very good at studies. This, apparently, is not good enough to insulate him from such acts of humiliation.

Children talked about fetching water from the well for the teachers' use. This responsibility is given to a few children; a little bit of probing revealed that this is because 'all children cannot touch the well'. When we asked the children about who specifically could not touch the well, they pointed to five or six children and said, 'They cannot touch, only we can touch, they are the Adi Kanada group (a particular group in SCs). They have a different well, we have a different well.' During this discussion, the concerned children sat withdrawn and quiet. Mercifully, the children claimed that they do not follow such exclusionary practices in the school among themselves—'we sit together, play together'! There was no evidence of discriminatory seating arrangements in the classroom.

ABSENCE OF DISCOURSE ON DISABILITY

The issue of disability, usually rendered invisible in rural India, also reared its head during our short visit to Kallur. While conversing with children, we observed that certain children were not allowed to introduce themselves. Other children spoke on their behalf. We could see that even if these children wanted to speak to us, others would not let them. We discovered later that these children suffered from some minor speech disorders and were not allowed to speak even in the classroom. Not surprisingly, their lack of voice has rendered them invisible in the classroom processes as well. When we took up the issue with the VEC members, they said they had never thought about it. Even the headmaster did not seem to take this matter seriously. He said that only those children who are medically certified are considered disabled. Since children with minor disabilities (like speech disorders) do not fall into this category, there is no attempt made to discuss the matter with parents. As per the departmental guidelines, the headmaster had sent in a list of 15 children with speech defects. However, when we asked teachers whether they needed any special skills to deal with such children, they were unconcerned. They said, 'Anyway, they are not many!' Numbers mattered, not the life and aspirations of the concerned children or their parents!

THE LURE OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Given that the majority of children attending the GHPS were from the SC and ST communities, we were curious to explore where the better-off

among the OBCs and FCs were sending their children. We did not have to look far, as all sources pointed to the fact that they were studying in the English-medium school. This was stated with great pride as well as yearning by some (see Table 11.10). The profile of children attending the private school shows that the number of SC/ST children is remarkably low compared to the general category and further, the number of girls is lower than that of boys. This issue of social segregation of schools and the ensuing hierarchies of access merits serious attention.

TABLE 11.10
Children in private school by caste and gender

	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
General	68	22	90
SC	7	4	11
ST	4	2	6
Total	79	28	107

The private lower primary school was started in 1997 and was recognised by the government in 1998–99. Mr J, the proprietor of the school, had been a lecturer in a private college for six years and started this school with the support of friends in the village and the town. The school is still in its infancy and despite their attraction to English-medium schools, some people were also sceptical about it. The school is a part of a larger federation of private schools that strives to create awareness about the merits of English-medium education. Children attending the school come here from the surrounding 15 villages. Kallur was selected as the location because it is in the geographical centre of these villages. Currently, the school has classes from lower kindergarten to class IV, with plans to open higher classes as the cohort moves. The school has a matador bus to pick up and drop children back home.

The school is presently running in a hired building. All the classes have individual rooms; however, they are cramped for space. The school has a staff of six teachers, among whom only four have some pre-service teacher training. Two have completed their Bachelor's degree in Education. None of the teachers has received any in-service training, though DPEP resource persons (from the BRC) are sometimes invited to provide some inputs. The admission fee ranges between Rs 100 and Rs 200 (depending on the economic status and class of entry) and the monthly fee is Rs 40. Students are provided with a tie and belt each from the school.

Parents pay an additional Rs 50 per month towards transportation. As the school is still trying to establish a reputation, fees and facilities probably vary across different clientele.

The proprietor of the school said that people prefer to send their children to an English-medium school and only those who cannot afford the fee send their children to government schools. The main attraction is the 'English' language, and since this is the only school where English is taught, there is a great demand for admission. Parents echoed these sentiments. They all wanted their children to learn 'English'. In general, parents feel that they would be depriving their children of something valuable by not sending them to private school. When we discussed this with the children from the government school, most of them talked about financial constraints—they said since private schools are expensive, only rich people can afford it. We met an old lady with her grandson near the private school. She said that her son sends two of his children (one boy and one girl) to the government school and the youngest son to the private school. Since he does not hold a regular job, he finds it very difficult to pay the fee, but he wants his youngest child to get a 'good' education. Somehow, 'good' education has come to be synonymous with an English-medium education.

The attraction towards English-medium private schools seems to be an important issue. Most of the people we met were very positive about this school. We also found that many government teachers send their children to English-medium schools in their area. Government schools, it appears, are only meant for poor people! The provision of school uniform accessories like a tie and belt also added to the mystique of the school. We say 'mystique' because we found no concrete evidence that children in private schools were in any way better off than those in the government school.

The school receives support from the local population—the Gowda community (the village elite) and a few others (all happening to be the members of the VEC) gives it its full support. It is a matter of prestige for them to have one more, that too an English-medium, school in their village and all their children attend the private school. They have also donated one acre of land near the main road for the school building that is anticipated to be ready by next year. The VEC members even said that people who want to aim high and want their children to join the civil services, the police or other government jobs, should send their children to private schools.

One positive opinion that came through the discussions in the village was that if DPEP continues with the same vigour, the GPS in Kallur could emerge as the 'best' school—a model government school. The one 'problem', according to the community, was the unavailability of an English-medium school. While the VEC has taken interest and ensured regular functioning, the community leaders continue to encourage both schools—tacitly maintaining social segregation. In the context of a growing clientele for private schools on the grounds that it provides 'good-quality education', the basic question of what constitutes quality education and the community's perception of quality need to be addressed seriously.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community participation has been flagged by DPEP as an integral component in the quest for universal primary education. Despite this insistence, the nature of community participation has not been clearly defined. In popular use, it seems to be restricted to certain mechanisms/structures created by the state to act as an interface between the community and the schools, namely the VEC. Kallur is considered by the local DPEP personnel to have a very efficient and active VEC and hence claim a high level of community participation. The VEC members echo this view. Eleven people responded to the headmaster's request for a VEC meeting—and they came with great interest and enthusiasm.

The VEC in Kallur meets on a monthly basis. Though all members do not attend every meeting, meetings are held regularly. They meet and discuss school activities and needs—they have successfully mobilised funds for a playground, contributed towards the whitewashing of the school and have recently donated a set of lockers for the teachers. They have devised an interesting mechanism for collecting funds called cheeti (some kind of a chit fund within a group, where all members contribute a specific amount which is won by each in rotation). This cheeti is taken out in the name of the school. Once the collection reaches a reasonable amount, it is spent for the benefit of the school on items like cupboards, prizes for children, etc.

When asked about their role as VEC members, they spoke of monitoring the punctuality and regularity of teachers and students. The headmaster added that even teachers who were notorious for being irregular are now regular. The VEC has also lobbied to make their teachers permanent (confirmation of posts) and have thus forged a personal link with the

teachers. In addition, they have successfully lobbied with local officials to refrain from posting teachers who are unable to stay for a reasonable length of time. They reported that though there has been a remarkable decline in absenteeism, a small number of students, especially from landless and poor households, are absent during peak agricultural seasons. With regard to infrastructure, they spoke about the need for more classrooms and a bigger playground, but there was no mention of the need to have a toilet for children, even older girl children. Given the settlement pattern, it is assumed that children can always run home, if necessary. The VEC, however, flagged the need for a peon to serve tea and attend to errands!

The VEC reported that it plays an active role in the Independence Day celebrations—along with teachers, parents and local youth groups. A day-long programme includes food for 1,000–1,500 people in the village. It is almost like a village festival. In 2000, the VEC participated in a campaign to identify children who have dropped out of school. They went from door-to-door and spoke to the parents. The survey done alongside the campaign revealed 13 out-of-school children—most of whom have now rejoined school. A local NGO called Jeevika also played an important role in this campaign. The NGO volunteers (comprising local SC youth) were critical in mobilising the SC community. Jeevika also takes the schoolchildren on an educational tour, an activity that, too, is supported by the VEC.

Most VEC members have undergone the three-day training provided by DPEP, which they attended in batches. When asked about the context of the training programme, they came out with some of the specific aspects—they knew that the VEC was supposed to take responsibility of the overall development of the school. They said that the role of VEC was to identify dropouts and make them come to school, to take care of the health of children, to take care of the village sanitation and environment, and to ensure the functioning of the anganwadi centre. They claimed that the training helped them to understand their role. Interestingly, they did not relate to the word DPEP and are not familiar with the programme. When asked if they saw any change in the school, one of the members explained how the introduction of the alphabet has changed. He said that earlier, it was *ka, ka, ki, ki*, etc. Now a leaf is shown and the letters in that particular word are introduced. He also admitted that the new system has improved the grasp of the children, including the weak ones. Though education for girls is considered to be very important, they have not paid special attention to girl children, nor have they paid attention to disabled children.

The social composition and the internal dynamics of the VEC also reveal the texture of community participation. Of the 11 members who came for the meeting, two were women. One woman represented the ST community while the other is the vice president of the gram panchayat. Neither spoke throughout the meeting. The members candidly said that the women were there only because of the legal requirement. Similarly, the representation of the SC and ST communities by two male members was also symbolic. They were there because representation of these communities is required by the structural guidelines of the VEC. The SC representative is an old *thatha* who cannot hear properly and was unable to grasp what was happening in the meeting. The irony of the situation was palpable. The token representation rarely goes beyond physical presence. Young SC boys/men, who are otherwise active and vocal, remain silent in the VEC. Even when they speak out in other forums, their elders are called and warned by the village elite. Most of the discussion in the VEC centred around five vocal members; the others remained passive listeners.

At the start of the VEC meeting, one member said that they were in that position because they have the capacity to donate—this, according to them, should be the sole criterion for membership. The dynamics of community participation was quite evident; the community here is reduced to a few elite who participate, take decisions and implement them in accordance with their wishes. The others have no choice but to follow these self-styled leaders.

‘Samudayadatta Shale’ (community participation in school) is a programme initiated by the education minister of Karnataka to ensure wider community participation. One day in the month is flagged for systematic interaction with parents/community. The Kallur GHPS also organises this programme but is unconvinced about its effectiveness. The participation in the programme has steadily decreased over the years—70 per cent to 50 per cent, and in the current year, only 20 per cent people participated. This decrease in participation, according to the programme authorities, was due to the fact that people cannot afford to come every month because of work. At the most, such events can be organised once or twice in a year. Though this process was a very positive attempt to involve parents in the school’s affairs, it did not survive because it lacked ground-level preparation. Parents were not approached in a constructive manner. Being a state-imposed programme it was implemented mechanically. In the end, the blame for its failure was happily

pinned on the parents on the grounds that they cannot participate due to pressure of work.

At the time of study, the state government had issued an order withdrawing the VEC and replacing it with the School Development and Monitoring Committee (SDMC). Membership to the SDMC is open only to the parents of children attending the school. During our visit, though, only the VEC had been formally dissolved; the SDMC had not yet been formed. When we asked VEC members regarding the forthcoming SDMC where only parents have the right of membership, the first reaction was, 'What do we know. Wait and see....' Then they started analysing the whole system.... 'Everywhere politics! Reservation! All those who can't even sign (put their thumb print) are coming into power. Even the woman who carries cow-dung becomes a president. What can these illiterate people, who do not know anything, do? Watch and see, why should we tell ... it will soon come out ...' said the VEC president. The hostility was evident. Gossip only fuelled the flame. 'In one of the nearby villages the SDMC president (an illiterate person) took away the school register and kept it at home—how can they do that?' a member declared dramatically. Others added to the fun, 'What else would people, without any experience and who get power, do?' Another said ironically, 'What can the laws do? Let them bring any law, we will see who will obey it.' The VEC members were certainly not shy about expressing their displeasure about ordinary people occupying key positions. The headmaster, however, was more diplomatic; he spoke about the need for clout and funds for effectiveness.

According to the teachers, 'Parents (SDMC) can manage the school. But they will need support. People are used to respecting the "dignitaries" [elites] of the place. So when people from the lower cadre of society get into such positions they do not get support. Such problems may arise.' The topic was also discussed in the SC youth group. They seemed confident about managing the SDMC. They were not hesitant about joining it, if invited. When asked how they would manage without money, they answered, 'Why do we need money to manage the school?' But, they continued, 'Anyway we will not be given such opportunity.' The SC youth group is very concerned about the education of their children. Every year they donate books to the students and conduct tuition classes for children from their community. Since this activity is not part of the school in any formal sense, it can probably be categorised as a people's initiative in 'education'. The youth group has also got involved in identifying dropouts. They have clearly noticed major changes taking place in primary education

over the last four years. According to them, people have become more conscious about education and are interested in sending their children to school. They are happy with the performance of children and are well informed about the school and its activities. Despite this, they are denied formal opportunities to serve the school. The questions therefore remain: who comprises the community, what does community participation mean, and how can community participation be ensured in any real or meaningful way? And finally, whose responsibility is it?

CONCLUSION

At one level Kolar is a classic success story. The last six to seven years have made a difference and children from SC and ST communities—both girls and boys—participate in schooling. This has gone hand-in-hand with the emergence of private schools and segregation between the haves and have-nots. The struggle now is to ensure good-quality education so that the poor can have higher aspirations and they can dare to dream of breaking barriers that caste and class have imposed on them for such a long time. Equalisation of educational opportunities does seem to go hand-in-hand with heightened social tension and, in this case, greater polarisation. The good news is that DPEP has made a dent—and a positive dent; the challenge is to sustain it.

NOTES

1. We gratefully acknowledge the inputs of Aarti Saihjee and Vimala Ramachandran in editing and substantially rewriting the field notes in the form of a case study.
2. Vimala Ramachandran, the then National Project Director of Mahila Samakhya, made the assessment with the support of local NGOs of Kolar in April 1988.

I2 SO CLOSE AND YET SO FAR:

PRIMARY SCHOOLING IN

WARANGAL DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH

Kameshwari Jandhyala¹

Issues of equity, access and retention in education have been of considerable concern in Andhra Pradesh for quite some time. With a SC population of 16 per cent and a ST population of 6 per cent, the state has, over the years, witnessed many initiatives to ensure equal educational opportunity to marginal social groups. This is evident in the progressive social welfare measures of the 1970s that resulted in a vast network of social welfare hostels and residential schools especially targeting children of SC/ST communities. Despite this promising beginning, the state continues to be dogged by low literacy levels, especially among females, and a high percentage of child labour—in fact the highest in the country. Not surprisingly, a majority of the working children belong to SC/ST communities of which a significant proportion are girls.

The Vision 2020 document brought out by the state government spells out its commitment to make Andhra Pradesh a state where ‘poverty is totally eradicated ... every man, woman and child ... have access, not just to basic minimum needs, but to all the opportunities to lead a happy and fulfilling life ...’ (Government of Andhra Pradesh 1999). The protection of the right of children to equality, equal opportunity and freedom from exploitation and the removal of obstacles to realising these rights is stated as the prime responsibility of the State. The Agenda for Education in the document has a clear focus on achieving social and gender equity and

includes elimination of child labour and ensuring a child's right to education.

Within this context DPEP is seen as a critical intervention to facilitating the achievement of social and gender equity in primary education. DPEP started in Andhra Pradesh in 1996-97 in five districts. As on date 19 of the districts in the state have been brought under the programme.

Over the last three years, through three to four month preparatory camps, Back-to-School campaigns have targeted children who have never enrolled or dropped out. In 1997, 42,000 children were mobilised; today, this number has increased significantly to cover two lakh children. Of these, 76 per cent have returned to school, 44 per cent of them being girls (Government of Andhra Pradesh 2000b). Half of those returning to school have been admitted into hostels. Despite these efforts large numbers of children continue to be outside the school system.

Recently a state-wide survey was conducted to identify the number of out-of-school children. As of April 2001, there are a total of 10,806,342 children in the school-going age-group of 5 to 14 years. Close to 85 per cent are enrolled in schools. There are however, 14.8 per cent of children still out of school. Though the disaggregation of this data by age, sex and social category is available at the individual district level, both at the state and district level it is not presented in a disaggregated form by social category, thereby making it difficult to pin down the number of out-of-school children among marginal groups.

BACKGROUND OF THE DISTRICT

Warangal district was selected for the micro study for a variety of reasons. When DPEP started in 1996-97, Warangal was chosen as one of the phase I districts of DPEP in the state. Further, the district has been part of all the innovative pilot initiatives like integrated education for special-needs children and the recent non-residential and residential bridge centres for mainstreaming the hardest to reach working children. Over a three-year period DPEP brought all 50 mandals of the district under the programme. In the first year, five mandals were covered, with the remaining 45 mandals being brought under the programme over the next two years.

The district has 1,012 villages (gram panchayats) with 3,043 habitations (including small habitations). It has an SC population of 17.2 per cent and an ST population of 13.7 per cent. As Table 12.1 shows, the literacy levels in the district for both males and females is well below the state average, which itself is below the national average.

TABLE 12.1
Literacy profile of Warangal district

	Andhra Pradesh		Warangal	
	1991	2001	1991	2001
Total	44.08	61.11	39.30	58.41
Male	55.12	70.85	51.98	70.01
Female	32.72	51.17	26.08	46.54

Source: GOI 1991 and 2001b: *District Census Handbook*, Warangal, Part XII-A and B, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1996, Census of India, 2001; *Paper 1 of 2001—Provisional Population Totals, Series 1—India: Table II*, p. 143.

There are currently 2,850 primary schools in Warangal. In an effort to bring all types of alternative initiatives into the mainstream, DPEP has recently decided to convert all alternative schools started in remote and scattered habitations either into non-residential transition bridge centres or into regular schools, with teachers recruited and appointed through the regular government selection process. A further development has been the process to upgrade schools into upper primary and high schools to ensure access to both elementary and secondary education.

Physical access to a school is no longer a major problem in the district. As Table 12.2 indicates, less than 10 per cent of habitations do not have a primary school (PS) within the stipulated distance of a school within 1 kilometre of the habitation.

TABLE 12.2
Access to school

<i>No. of habitations in the district</i>	<i>No. of habitations with a PS within a radius of 1 km</i>	<i>No. of habitations without a PS within a 1 km radius</i>
3,043	2,755	288

Source: DPEP Warangal: *Annual Work Plan and Budget*, 2001–02.

It is reported that in the district, though all SC habitations have 100 per cent access to a school, access continues to be problematic for ST habitations (see Table 12.3).

The district plans for the year 2001–02 indicate a strategy to bridge the accessibility gap in habitations without schools and to enable out-of-school children to be mainstreamed through the Non-residential Bridge Centres (NRBC) in the villages and the residential bridge centres started in the district.

TABLE 12.3
Education profile of district

Number of schools				Teachers		
Primary	ALS	Upper primary schools	High schools	Primary	UPS	High schools
2,106	175	360	338	4,994	1,853	3,487

Source: DPEP Warangal: *Annual Work Plan and Budget*, 2001–02.

As one of the districts selected for pilot initiatives for Integrated Education (IE), Warangal was surveyed to identify the number of special-needs children in the primary school-going age group. There are 4,916 special-needs children, of whom 32.7 per cent (1,612) are in school and 67.2 per cent (3,304) are out of school (see Table 12.4).

TABLE 12.4
Special-needs children in the district

Children	Hearing impaired	Visually impaired	Physically handicapped	Mentally retarded	Total
Total no. in the					
5–14 age-group	1,089	229	2,503	1,095	4,916
School-going	588	128	448	448	1,612
Non-school-going	501	101	2,055	647	3,304

Source: DPEP, Warangal: *Annual Work Plan and Budget*, 2001–02.

Special pilot initiatives for IE were introduced in three mandals in the district, including the mandal selected for the micro study, where assessment camps were conducted, assistance devices provided to physically handicapped children and district level resource persons identified for monitoring and supporting the teacher in handling the special-needs of these children in the classroom.

While the district as a whole has a long way to go to achieve universal enrolment, we were informed that total enrolment has been achieved in 400 habitations so far, i.e., in about 13 per cent of the habitations. Enrolment has emerged as a key issue of concern not only in Warangal but also in several of the other DPEP districts.

Enrolment in class I has been very problematic. Warangal is one of several districts with very large numbers of underage children enrolled in class I. The enrolment of large numbers of underage children is attributed to the three kilograms of rice given to each child. This is an issue

that is under focus across the state this year to ensure that underage children are not enrolled and that there is no detention in classes. District projects have been advised to make some arrangements for smaller children/siblings, but to make sure that only children of the correct age are enrolled in school. Consequently it is reported that the numbers in class I have come down significantly. Table 12.5 shows the enrolment in classes I to V during 2000–01.

TABLE 12.5
Class-wise enrolment in 2000–01 for classes I to V

Class	Boys	Girls	Total
I	78,741	76,961	155,702
II	35,310	34,741	70,051
III	33,575	32,394	65,969
IV	32,426	29,305	61,731
V	31,740	28,234	59,974

Source: DPEP Directorate, Hyderabad.

During the course of last year the number of children in and out of school was assessed in order to arrive at more effective strategies to target out-of-school children in the district (see Table 12.6).

TABLE 12.6
Out-of-school children in the district

	Total no. of children in the 5–14 years age-group	In-school children	Out-of-school children (OSC)	% of OSC
District	632,255	552,885	79,370	12.6
SC	126,013	108,660	17,353	13.8
ST	115,167	86,572	28,595	24.9
Girls	300,709	256,797	43,912	14.9

Source: DPEP Directorate, Hyderabad.

As Table 12.6 shows, around 58 per cent of the children identified as out-of-school belong to SC/ST categories, indicating that the strategies to achieve social equity need to be strengthened, even though 90 per cent of habitations have been provided with a school within a kilometre radius of the habitation.

A major focus in DPEP has been to evolve multiple strategies to bring the vast numbers of out-of-school children into schools. The strategies identified for enrolling such children in the current year are: running

bridge classes through non-residential centres at the habitation level; residential bridge camps, ensuring access to education in habitations without schools; converting all alternative schools into regular schools with regular teachers appointed; community campaigns and drives and a closer monitoring at village level based on the out-of-school children surveys. NRBCs have been started in habitations that have 10 or more children out of school. A teacher and a social mobiliser have been appointed for each of these centres. In Warangal district eight residential bridge centres have been started of which four are for boys, one for girls, two are for both boys and girls and one is an NRBC.

PROFILE OF THE SELECTED MANDAL

The mandal in which Chemurapalli village is located has a high SC population, much higher than the district average. It was part of the first group of mandals where DPEP was launched. Currently it is one of the six mandals identified in the district for a special focus under UEE. Further, it is a mandal where several of the special components of DPEP are present—ECE, IE, the residential and non-residential bridge centres and AS in scattered and remote habitations.

The mandal has 23 villages with a total of 32 habitations. Among these four are entirely SC habitations. There are 40 primary schools, two upper primary schools and 14 high schools in the mandal.

As Table 12.7 shows, around 5 per cent of children in the school-going population have been identified as being out-of-school. These children, who are working children, include school dropouts as well as never-enrolled children. In addition, around 638 children have been identified as being irregular.

TABLE 12.7
Education profile of mandal

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Children in the 5–14 school-going age group	12,667	6,211	6,456
School-going	11,992	5,890	6,120
Out-of-school	675	321	354

Source: DPEP Warangal.

The selection of the village for the micro study within the panchayat was done after visiting four villages. Chemurapalli was selected since it is

a fairly large village with a one-third SC population. Chemurapalli is about 6 kilometres from the mandal headquarters. A further factor that influenced its selection was the presence of two primary schools within the village, one with a woman headmistress in the SC colony.

PROFILE OF CHEMURAPALLI VILLAGE

As per the 1991 Census Chemurapalli has 686 households with a total population of 3,753. The village profile is given in Table 12.8.

TABLE 12.8
Village profile

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Population	3,753	1,895	1,858
SC	1,246	645	601
ST	27	13	14
0-6 years	496	237	259
Literates	1,557	1,096	461
Main workers	1,812	1,014	798
Marginal workers	68	3	65
Non-workers	1,873	878	995

Source: GOI 1991, *District Census Handbook, Warangal, Part XII-A and B*, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1996.

While SCs constitute a third of the village population, the BCs form the dominant caste group. A few forward castes are also present. The main occupation is agriculture, though some villagers do hold jobs in the nearby town.

As Table 12.9 shows there is vast gap in the literacy rate between the dominant BCs and the SC community. The gap is equally evident across gender lines between the caste groups as well as within a single caste group.

TABLE 12.9
Literacy rates in the village

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Village	51.9	63.3	40
BC	60	70.9	48.8
SC	44.9	56.7	32.3

Source: DPEP Warangal.

GOING INTO CHEMURAPALLI

Chemurapalli is about 6 kilometres from the mandal headquarters and about five from the major district town. A tarred road leads into the village. It also has electricity, a public call booth and a large, protected, drinking water tank. The water however, does not suffice for the entire village nor does it reach some of the SC households located on the periphery. The village has a good bus service with buses plying thrice a day. There is a bus stop at the entrance to the village near the main area and as well as one near the SC colony further down the road. Under the chief minister's Employment of Youth programme several SC young men have been sanctioned autorickshaws, thereby making transportation all the more accessible.

Not surprisingly, spatially, the families are clustered by social category. The BC families are located near the entrance of the village, which is perceived to be the main part of the village. The SC colony lies towards the end of the village and flanks the road on either side. The better-off SCs with pucca houses and all the other trappings of being upwardly mobile—electricity at home, RCC roofed houses with three to four rooms, livestock, in some cases a two-wheeler, radio/TV, own wells, jewellery—live closer to the road and in the front part of the colony. It was reported that there are around 50 to 60 SC households who are as wealthy as the BCs. The poorer SCs are located at the rear of the colony. The entire life of the village is centred around the bus stops and along the road.

CHILD POPULATION AND EDUCATIONAL STATUS

There are 686 children in Chemurapalli in the 0–14 years age-group, of which 566 are of school-going age (see Table 12.10).

TABLE 12.10
Population in 0–14 age-group

<i>Age-group</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
0–2	34	29	59
3–4	27	35	62
5–7	79	63	142
8–11	125	126	251
12–14	87	86	173

Source: DPEP, Warangal, January 2001.

Surveys to identify out-of-school children indicate that there are around 72 such children in the village (see Table 12.11).

TABLE 12.11
Educational status in 2001

Age-group	Out-of-school			School-going		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
5-7	11	6	17	68	57	125
8-11	10	11	21	117	115	232
12-14	21	13	34	67	70	137
5-14	42	30	72	252	242	494

Source: DPEP, Warangal.

The main reason for children being out of school, cited during group discussions by the mandal resource person, teachers and community members was that the families of these children are poor. In addition, older girls are burdened with household work, responsibility for looking after younger siblings and agricultural work. Most of the out-of-school boys are bonded child labour, called 'jeetagallu' in Andhra Pradesh. The boys are bonded to well-off families for agricultural work, watch and ward in the field or for grazing livestock. The families of bonded children in Chemurapalli village receive an advance ranging from Rs 1,500-7,500 per year. In addition, the bonded children are given two meals a day and a set of clothes each year.

ACCESS TO SCHOOLING

Access to a school is not a problem in Chemurapalli. The village has two government primary schools (PS), one private school, a high school and two anganwadis, one each in the main part of the village and the SC colony. One primary school (hereafter PS-I) is located in the SC colony. The other primary school (hereafter PS-II) is located at the entrance of the village. PS-II was earlier an upper primary school that has recently been upgraded to a high school and, in 1998, was separated from the high school as a primary school. Several children go to private schools in the nearby town. It was reported that around six buses from different private schools come to the village.

There is also a private but unrecognised school in the main part of the village. It was started in 2000 by a young, educated man from the

neighbouring district of Karimnagar. His relatives had informed him that the village lacked a private school and that there was a growing demand for an English-medium school in Chemurapalli. Since he had previously worked in a private school and was also a partner in running a private school in his village, he decided to start a school with both Telugu- and English-medium sections. The Telugu section has a nursery class and classes I to IV, while the English has lower and upper kindergarten classes. The fees charged by this school range from Rs 30–50 for the Telugu-medium section, and Rs 50 for the English-medium classes.

PS-I is at the very entrance to the SC colony and right next to the bus stand. The building is old and neglected. It consists of one large room with a verandah. Attached to it on one side is a small community hall (10' × 10') that the school used for some time as a classroom. It is currently in a state of disrepair and closed. On the other side is a large room with a tin roof that was built last year with general funds of the mandal. The flooring is kuccha and becomes unusable during the rainy season.

The school does not have a compound wall though a certain amount of space has been earmarked for the school. Right next to the verandah is a hand pump provided by DPEP. However the water is so substandard that the children use the hand pump next to the anganwadi centre that is 50 metres across from the school.

The private school is run in a large, rented house and has two very large rooms, one of which adjoins a courtyard. The school has no provision for drinking water.

Neither the government primary schools nor the private school has toilet facilities. The high school has a toilet only for the teachers.

WHO GOES TO WHICH SCHOOL

Enrolment in the three primary schools is determined by location, caste/class factors as well as by perceptions of the status ascribed to the particular school. There are 118 children enrolled in PS-I, all of who are SC children from the colony (see Table 12.12).

Children enrolled in PS-II are mainly from the BC community; only a small number belong to the SC group. Of the 124 children (61 girls and 63 boys) in the school 23 are SC children (9 girls and 14 boys). A few of these are from the SC colony and others from SC families living in the main village. There was an oblique comment made during focus-group discussions in the SC colony that many of the SC children in PS-II belong

TABLE 12.12
Enrolment in PS-I for the year 2001-02

<i>Class</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
I	14	8	6
II*	23	8	15
III**	41	19	22
IV***	22	15	7
V****	18	11	7
Total	118	61	57

Source: School register for the year 2001-02.

Notes: *One boy detained last year for being irregular.

**One boy detained last year for being irregular and, as the HM put it, 'low standard'.

***One deaf-mute girl.

****One mentally challenged boy/slow learner readmitted in class V as part of the IED/UEE drive in 2001.

to a different SC sub-group, and would therefore prefer to send their children to PS-II that is patronised by the dominant caste. We were, however, unable to probe this issue further. The youth in the SC colony were categorical that when children from the colony try to seek admission in PS-II they are discouraged and told to attend the school in their own colony. While it was not clearly articulated these youths had a definite sense of being discriminated against. All of them had studied up to but not necessarily completed class X.

The private school in the village has 94 children, 67 in the Telugu-medium and 27 in the English-medium section. The children are mainly from the BC community with a small number of SC children—six boys and two girls—enrolled in classes I and II. The school, however, does not maintain a proper register. The numbers were tabulated during our visit to the school. The teacher mentioned that there were one or two SC children in the English medium but this was not recorded in the school register (see Table 12.13).

Of the 566 children in the school-going age-group in the village, 339 are enrolled in the three primary schools and 72 have been identified as out of school. There was no clear information on the remaining 155. The mandal resource person informed us that in all probability, these 155 children are going to private schools outside the village. This perhaps is a valid assumption given the fact that six private school buses ply in this village. We were, however, unable to ascertain how many of these children are from the SC community, though we were informed that the well-off SC families prefer to send their children to private schools in the town.

TABLE 12.13
Enrolment in the private school

No. of children	Boys	Girls	SC Boys	SC Girls	Handicapped	Total
Telugu medium						
Class I	9	8	3			17
Class II	7	6	3	2		13
Class III	3	3				6
Class IV	4	2			2 boys physically handicapped	6
Shishu class	15	10				25
Total	38	29				67
English medium						
LKG	8	11				19
UKG	6	2				8
Total	14	13				27

Source: School register and discussion with Headmaster.

Another survey is currently underway to specifically track where all the children in the school-going age-group are enrolled, both within and outside the village.

Focus-group discussions in the SC colony with self-help group members and other men and women highlighted the community's perceptions regarding private schools, both in the village as well as those outside it. There seems to be a strong belief that private schools instil discipline, are better since each class has a teacher, and offer the child an opportunity to learn English. We found several instances where younger children had first been sent to the private school in the village for a year or two and then enrolled into the government school. They felt that since PS-I is located, as it were, at their very doorstep, younger children tend to run back home. Most felt that if they could afford it, they would send their younger children to the private school. This perception has little to do with the quality of the teachers and teaching in the private school. This is an area that merits further investigation.

COHORT ANALYSIS

A cohort analysis of PS-I shows that in 1997 there were 70 children—42 boys and 28 girls—enrolled in class I. An analysis of the class V cohort of 2001 over the past five years from 1997 highlights the issue mentioned earlier of a large number of underage children being enrolled in class I (see Table 12.14).

TABLE 12.14
Cohort analysis, classes I to V in PS-I, 1997–2001

<i>Total number of children enrolled in class I in 1997: 70</i>		
<i>Status in 2001</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Transition to class V	10	7
Readmitted in class V (under UEE and IED drive)	1	
Repeater now in IV	11	5
Repeater now in III	5	7
Other school/hostel*	3	3
Now re-enrolled in class I	1	
Entered IV and left in V	1	
Dropout	3	
Dropout and are jeetagallu	2	
Jeetagallu enrolled in the non-residential bridge centre	2	
Joined the residential bridge camp during the course of the micro study		1
Left village	1	4
No information	2	
Died		1
Total	42	28

Source: School registers of PS-I and discussion with Headmistress.

Note: *Of the three boys in private schools, two joined private school after repeating class I, and one joined PS-II after repeating class I. Among the three girls, one girl joined a hostel after class I, one joined a private school after class I and a special-needs girl left after class I to attend a special-needs school for the hearing impaired in the town.

Class V of 2001 has 18 children—seven boys and 10 girls—who had joined the school in class I in 1997, and one mentally retarded and slow-learning boy, who has been readmitted in the current academic year as part of the UEE drive and the effort to integrate special-needs children. The data shows that of the 70 children enrolled in class I in 1997, several were underage and in some cases were detained and made to repeat the class for two years. The data also indicates that there are no dropouts amongst girls. Among boys there are five dropouts, two of whom have gone back to being bonded labour (jeetagallu).

Excluding eight children (four girls and three boys who had either left the village or about whom there is no information, and one girl who died) 57 of the remaining 62 children, i.e., 91.9 per cent enrolled in class I in 1997, are studying in various classes in different schools.

It must be mentioned here that the headmistress, who has worked in the same school for the past six years, helped in tracking almost all the

children. She knew the children by name and was able to provide information on where they were studying and their current status.

A cohort analysis was also attempted for PS-II, focusing on SC children in class V in 2001. Since the school had been separated from the high school in 1998 several of the earlier records were with the high school and not easily accessible. School registers from 1999 were available; therefore an analysis from class III has been possible. Of the seven SC children (three girls and four boys) who were in class III in 1999 six continued into class IV and V, with one girl dropping out after class III. In 2001 two new boys joined class V. There was no information about the girl who left or about the schools that the new entrants had previously attended from classes I to V.

TRANSITION BEYOND CLASS V

Checking dropouts and ensuring transition to upper primary has been a focal area over the past two years. Teachers of PS-I reported that during the last two years there have been no dropouts and transition to class VI is 100 per cent. This is borne out in the current academic year as well where 24 children (10 boys and 14 girls) who had passed class V from PS-I in the SC colony were enrolled in the high school in class VI. This was confirmed by a visit to the high school where all 24 children were present.

In PS-II as well the transition to high school is 99 per cent. Of the 33 children in class V last year 32 have enrolled in class VI this year. Of these, five are SCs.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ANGANWADI)

For three years beginning 1998 DPEP ran an ECE centre in an abandoned gobar gas plant behind PS-I in the SC colony. After the anganwadi was moved to the school premises the ECE was closed in accordance with the DPEP decision to integrate the ECE and anganwadi. The anganwadi building has been constructed within 50 metres of the school. It has a storeroom, a large room and veranda. The PS uses the veranda for one of the classes or to run the non-residential bridge classes. The anganwadi also has a hand pump that is used by the PS children since the water from the hand pump near the school is not potable.

There are many complaints from teachers and the community about the merger of the ECE with the anganwadi. The anganwadi teacher who is paid an extra honorarium to keep the anganwadi open till the school closes, refuses to abide by this and closes the anganwadi when she pleases. The youth in the colony pointed out that since the anganwadi teacher is a BC she does not much care for SC children. There were allegations that she pilfers the supplementary nutrition provided for the children. However it was reported that ever since the anganwadi moved closer to the school, and is within full view of the colony, the teacher has become more careful about feeding the children. On the first day of our field visit we noticed that there were about 10 children in the anganwadi and that by noon itself, the teacher was keen to finish feeding the children and shut shop.

The anganwadi teacher was critical of the fact that her building was being used to teach class III, which she views as an intrusion into her space and autonomy. On the third day of the field visit she went on leave and her registers were not available for scrutiny. Teachers and community members feel that the ECE is a better option and should be kept separate from the anganwadi, where the major problem appears to be one of supervision. The anganwadi teacher does not pay heed to any suggestions made by the teachers or school committee members on the grounds that she does not work for the education department.

The primary school's view is that there is no benefit in having an anganwadi so close to the school. The anganwadi building was constructed near the school under the aegis of DPEP as part of converging the ICDS with the school system. Obviously the strategy is not working. The only benefit, as the teachers put it, is the hand pump that provides potable water. The teachers expressed a sense of frustration and helplessness in that their repeated complaints to the higher authorities did not result either in a reintroduction of the ECE in the SC colony or in any change in the behaviour of the anganwadi teacher.

The district project office is aware of this since similar complaints have also come in from other villages. Unless there is a policy change at the state level it appears that nothing can be done at the district or village level. This seems to belie the claim that interventions are designed to meet local specific needs and requirements. Further it also raises serious questions on the whole issue of convergence. Even though convergence is desirable and necessary it would appear that it could be effectively realised only in plans and strategies and not so much on the ground. Unless the whole issue of lines of management and authority are sorted

out the experience of Chemurapalli may well be the rule rather than the exception.

INTEGRATED EDUCATION (IED)

The IED initiative was started in 1999 in this mandal and hence in Chemurapalli. Surveys identified five handicapped children in the SC colony—two hearing impaired, two mentally retarded (one also physically handicapped) and one with behavioural problems. At present only one hearing-impaired girl (class IV) and one mentally retarded boy (class V) are in school. The physically handicapped, slow learner boy is enrolled in the NRBC. Others are enrolled but not coming to school. The head-mistress' daughter, who has a speech problem, was also enrolled for a year but subsequently moved to a special school. The children are comfortable and well integrated. It was observed that the teachers make no special efforts while dealing with these children; however other children were seen to help their handicapped colleagues with ease. The hearing impaired girl has been given a hearing aid. Special-needs children are also enrolled in the private primary school as well as in the high school.

While handicapped children have been identified and aids have been provided, especially to the hearing impaired and physically disabled children, the teachers are not equipped to deal with the special-needs of these children, particularly the slow learners. There was little evidence of any support provided by the mandal resource group that was formed to help and assist the teachers.

These initial steps have been very encouraging and positive in that everyone one met in the village felt that all special-needs children must be in school. One indication of awareness created by this initiative was manifested by persistent queries put by one of the parents for more information on how his hearing impaired daughter in class IV could be helped to perform better in school, and what her future prospects would be.

THE NON-RESIDENTIAL BRIDGE CENTRE: ADDRESSING CHILD LABOUR

In recent times initiatives to mainstream child labour have been critical to education planning, particularly in DPEP, Andhra Pradesh. Children identified as child labour include school dropouts, never-enrolled children, older girls and jeetagallu, the bonded child labour boys. It was during the

1990s that the whole issue of child labour has been brought into the public domain primarily through the efforts of NGOs. This experience has informed government initiatives as well and has evolved into strategies on scale under DPEP. The Andhra Pradesh experience and strategies have also been the basis for similar efforts in other states in the country. Broadly the strategies include a holistic approach of awareness, community-level advocacy and educational interventions such as short- and long-term camps, both residential as well as non-residential, to act as bridges to enable children to be mainstreamed. This approach goes beyond the special schools set up under the National Child Labour programme and takes the issue into the fold of the community itself.

During 1998–2000 two child labour schools or centres were started in Chemurapalli village, one in the SC colony (30 children) and one in the BC colony (28 children) under the National Child Labour Project (NCLP). These schools were discontinued at the end of the project in the last quarter of 2000. It was difficult to get a handle on this intervention. Registers have not been properly maintained and there is considerable confusion regarding the number of children in these centres. What we managed to gather is that there was a continuous attempt to mainstream children through 1999–2000. In an ironic twist this special initiative also resulted in three girls and eight boys, already enrolled in the formal primary school in the SC colony, being withdrawn and admitted to the child labour centre for one year and then re-enrolled in the formal school the following year.

A successor to the NCLP project is the NRBC for out-of-school children. An NRBC was started in March 2001 in the SC colony after an intensive drive to identify out-of-school and working children. It has one teacher and one social mobiliser. The role of the latter is to keep in continuous contact with the families of out-of-school children and motivate them to send their children either to school or to the centre. Both the social mobiliser and the teacher were selected from within the SC community. The social mobiliser has passed class X and the teacher is a failed intermediate (class XII). The teacher has currently been dismissed for unauthorised absence for a long period. The social mobiliser is thus doubling as a teacher for the NRBC as well as helping out in PS-I where one of the teachers is on leave. Both the teacher and the mobiliser were given a three-day orientation on how to use the graded learner 'Telugu Velugu', which has been developed in the district as a bridge curriculum.

Initially NRBC classes were held in the room attached to the abandoned gobar gas plant (gas generated from bio waste—in this case cow dung). Because the area is very unhygienic and used for defecation purposes the

classes were shifted to the verandah of the anganwadi or the school. During our visit however, we found it difficult to assess the efficacy of the centre as the mobiliser was also handling class III of the formal school.

Reportedly the NRBC also served as a summer school and a remedial learning centre attended by several school-going children. Tables 12.15 and 12.16 give details of the enrolment in NRBC between March and August and the status of children who attended its summer sessions.

TABLE 12.15
Enrolment in the non-residential bridge centre, March–August 2001

Month	Total	Girls	Boys	Remarks
March	30	11	19	
April	25	6	19	5 girls identified for the residential camp
May	49*	15	34	Included 14 who are jeetagallu
June	49*	15	34	Included 14 who are jeetagallu
July	29	8	21	15 joined formal school—nine to PS attached to high school and six to the PS in SC colony Of the 14 jeetam children, five dropped out (two had completed class V and are in the 14+ age-group, eight are in the NRBC, and one left the village)
August	15	7	8	All the eight boys are jeetagallu

Source: NRBC register.

TABLE 12.16
Status as on date of the 49 children in NRBC in May and June

Institution	Total	Girls	Boys
PS in SC colony	14	6	8
PS attached to high school	1	1	
High school	14	3	11
Private school in village	1		1
Non-residential bridge centre	13	3	10
Out-of-school	4	2	2
Residential bridge camp			
High school in neighbouring village	1		1
Private schools in town	1		1

Source: NRBC register.

The use of the term 'out of school' has tended to gloss over the issue of the existence of bonded children in the village. It is only in extended conversations with teachers and the community that the problem is even acknowledged. Children in school have been the best informants, quick

to point out the bonded children in the colony. The entire issue of equity takes on a new meaning when, with a primary school literally at their doorsteps, there are bonded children in one family that lives next door to the school. Some of the boys served as bonded labour within the SC community itself—a fact that has failed to disturb or create a ripple within the community. It is not clear if any attempt has been made in Chemurapalli to squarely confront the SC community and others with this issue. Issues such as bonded and child labour cannot be resolved through educational interventions alone. They would require the concerted and convergent action by all related departments so that the problem can

Box 12.1

Persuading the parents

The case of Sita merits attention. Sita was withdrawn from school in class III to help in looking after the children of her married sister who had returned to her natal home along with her husband in search of work. Sita has a brother who dropped out after class IX. Sita's mother was adamant that the family could not afford to send her to school. Sita's friend, Usha, who lives next door, was determined to ensure that her friend goes to school. From the moment we entered the village Usha pestered us to talk to Sita's mother. Her father was not perceived as an obstacle.

Finally, when we went to talk to Sita's mother, the social mobiliser and a large number of school children led by Usha accompanied us. Some men and women gradually joined us. The discussion lasted for over an hour. Sita's mother was furious since every one was pressuring her. Sita's father left saying that if his wife agreed he had no objection to sending Sita to the residential camp. Sita's brother intervened to say that she was not in school because she was not interested. Usha cut in to say that Sita was taken out to do housework.

The mother stated that Sita could not go as she had only one pair of clothes. Sita quickly retorted that she had two extra pairs of clothes. We left it at that. In the afternoon when the older girl was going to the camp, Sita joined her with her small bag of clothes.

The next day when we met the mother after meeting Sita in the camp, she and her older daughter were really concerned about whether Sita was being fed properly, whether she was crying, who was braiding her hair and so on. This time the mother was all smiles, wanting to discuss many things regarding her family. Her parting shot was that Sita would never have made it to the camp but for the persistence of Usha, who stopped by every morning to check and see whether Sita would be allowed to come to school.

be addressed from a variety of directions. We were informed that often definitional problems between different departments, such as labour and social welfare, also impede such concerted action.²

At the time of writing we were informed that about 32 children in the SC colony are still out of school. They include eight girls and 26 boys, 21 of whom are bonded labour. We came across one family with four children, two boys and two girls, (two adolescents and two smaller children) who have never been enrolled. The two girls are engaged in agricultural work and the older brother is a bonded labourer. These children are the main breadwinners of the family. The father is an alcoholic who does not allow his wife to go out to work. The girls are keen to attend the residential bridge camp. The older girl feels that at least her younger sister should have an opportunity to study. During our interactions with him the father agreed to send the younger girl to the residential camp. We were also able to convince two families to send their 14- and 10-year-old girls who had dropped out after class III to the residential bridge centre. We met both of them on our visit to the residential camp.

BEYOND THE ELEMENTARY STAGE: THE HIGH SCHOOL

As mentioned earlier the upper primary school was upgraded to a high school in 1998. The high school has eight teachers—four female and four male. In addition there are three parateachers (two male and one female) who are paid Rs 1,500 per month. The school is located in a large compound of over 1 acre and has a newly constructed compound wall. There are large trees under which classes are held when there is no rain. The general picture is one of a quiet learning centre.

A new school building is under construction. When the high school was started a separate building for the primary school (PS-II) was also constructed with two rooms, an office room and a veranda. The PS however, currently has only one classroom and the office at its disposal. The other classroom is being used by the high school.

Admission to the high school entails an admission fee of Rs 45. This is used for a variety of purposes: Rs 12 towards parent-teacher activities, Rs 8 towards exam fees as per district common exam board guidelines and the balance for celebrations like Independence Day. In addition the school collects Rs 100 as a fee for issuing a Transfer Certificate, especially to children who pass the class X exams. This money goes into the school development fund. While the headmaster claimed that in needy cases

they do not collect this fee, discussions with the community and the School Education Committee (SEC) revealed that these fees are compulsory and seldom waived. There was some disagreement on the admission fee as well. The community members in the SC colony reported that the school charges higher fees: Rs 100 for the local SCs, Rs 150 for others and Rs 200 for outsiders. We could not establish the veracity of this claim.

Every one we met felt that having a high school in the village is beneficial for the children, since it will enable them, especially girls, to continue their education beyond the primary stage. This came across clearly in focus-group discussions in the SC colony. There are 296 children enrolled in the high school (see Table 12.17). Of these 104 belong to the SC community, 186 to the BC community and six to other forward castes. It is interesting to note that of the 186 BC children 122 are girls. This seems to suggest that many more girls than boys of the BC community are sent to the school in the village. The boys are sent to private schools in the nearby town. It needs to be pointed out that a detailed analysis of high school-going children in the village was not undertaken as part of this micro study.

TABLE 12.17
Enrolment in ZP High School

Class	Total	SC Boys	SC Girls	BC Boys	BC Girls	OC Boys	OC Girls
VI-A	38●	11	9	7	10		1
VI-B	35†	5	8	9	13		
VII-A	35	7	5	7	16		
VII-B	37	9	5	5	16	2	
VIII-A	31	7	—	5	16	2	
VIII-B	30	3	6	5	16		
IX	49	6	8	12	22		1
X	43	8*	7	14	13		

Source: High school register and discussion with Headmaster.

Notes: * Two came from private schools.

● Includes 24 children (14 girls and 10 boys) who have come in from PS-I in the SC area.

† Total of five handicapped in the school—one hearing-impaired child in class VIII and four in class VI.

The headmaster had some interesting observations on attendance. SC children are seasonally irregular because their financial situation compels them to work and contribute to the family. BC children are irregular

Box 12.2

Residential bridge camps

There are 35 residential bridge camps started under DPEP across the state. There are eight in Warangal district, one for girls, four for boys, two mixed centres and one-day residential camp for girls. The camps are for 9–14 year-old children—dropouts, working children, never-enrolled and jitam children. The duration of the camp is six months during which time children are taken through a bridge curriculum called Telugu Velugu, a graded learning primer that brings them up to class V standard. After this it is anticipated that the children will be mainstreamed to formal schools and hostels. So far there is no clear-cut strategy to ensure that the children in the camps do transit to the higher classes or formal schools.

The mandal selected for the micro study has two bridge camps, one for boys and one for girls. The girls' camp is located in the mandal headquarters in a building belonging to the Women and Child Development Department where a women's training centre used to run. Next door is a DPEP supported primary school. The boys' camp is in a village where a large house with a big compound has been donated to the government for starting this camp. Each camp has four teachers. Both camps were visited during the field trip. It was reported that when the boys' camp started one jitam boy was admitted from Chemurapalli village, but he ran back home within a week.

Of the 48 girls we interacted with eight were never enrolled. The rest were dropouts, 20 of them after class II. In the boys' camp 25 out of the 100 were bonded labour and 50 ST boys used to work in construction and agriculture. For the boys and girls, the camps, the teachers and the general atmosphere is a dream come true, an escape from the drudgery of work. However what will happen to them after six months in the camp is very uncertain. Though parents had agreed to send the children because of the short duration of the camp, the children clearly evinced a desire to study further.

because they are financially well off and because they watch TV excessively.

INSIDE THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

It was during classroom observation in PS-I that we were able to gain some insight into classroom processes and practices. The male teacher who was handling classes II and IV and the female teacher who was handling classes I and V were observed.

Class II had 13 children, eight girls and five boys, and class IV had 17 children, five girls and 12 boys. Class I had seven children, three girls and four boys and class V had 16 children, six boys and 10 girls. All the children had received the prescribed books on time, at the beginning of the academic year. They came to school in fairly clean though wornout clothes. Some of the girls wore skirts that were quite tattered. Each child had a bag for carrying books.

Classes II and IV were held in the newly constructed room with a kuccha floor and no furniture. Classes I and V were held in what is perceived as the main schoolroom which also doubles as the headmistress' office. Here there are five benches that were bought from the school improvement fund and used by class V since everyone felt children in class V needed them as they were in a higher class. Children sit on these benches hunched over their books. Those sitting on the floor seemed distinctly more comfortable.

The headmistress' office-cum-classroom had several charts hanging haphazardly on the walls. Most are pictures of leaders, some are on sanitation and the small family norm and in one corner are teaching aid charts that had obviously been prepared quite a while ago but seem hardly used. The room is cluttered with two almirahs and a box that contains the school registers and other materials. There are mice running around since the rice to be distributed to the children is stored nearby in one corner. The general atmosphere is one of disorder. The other classroom has a table and a chair for the teacher and two blackboards.

In both classrooms sitting patterns varied with the classes. Classes I and II were made to sit in small groups, boys and girls mixed together. In classes IV and V there was an automatic divide with the children sitting in rows, girls in front and boys at the back. Though both the teachers and the children saw this as natural it probably also had something to do with the teaching methodologies adopted. In lower classes flashcards were used. For instance children in class II were asked to identify matras from the cards and copy them on their slates. In classes IV and V the teacher used the blackboard extensively. This automatically meant that the children had to face the teacher and sitting in rows to do that seemed to come easily. The blackboard itself seemed to be the teacher's preserve. Children were not called upon to use it.

Both teachers alternated their time between the two classes by giving written work to the older class and using flashcards to interact with the younger children. The headmistress, who handled class I, used flashcards that had earlier been developed for the ECE centres. The cards had

pictures of animals, flora and fauna. The cards and the pictures on them were so small that both the teacher and the children had difficulty using them.

It was observed that both teachers would write down a word on the blackboard and then ask the children to build sentences around them, identify the matras and write down other words using the same matras. During a lesson on birds in class IV, the teacher showed children a picture of a bird and then led on to an exercise on naming other birds in the village. The teacher wrote some names on the board and asked the children to write the names of any other birds they could think of in their notebooks, the allotted time being five minutes. The children then read out what they had listed. The child listing the highest number of birds was applauded by the entire class.

During the Telugu session in class V, the teacher asked the children to enact a role-play based on one of the lessons. The children had obviously done this role-play before since all of them were familiar with their parts. In both cases, however, it seemed that the teachers were keen to demonstrate that they were adopting an interactive methodology.

There were two special-needs children in the classes observed, a hearing-impaired girl in class IV and a mentally retarded/slow learner in class V. Both children are well integrated with the other children. The hearing-impaired girl was constantly helped by her friends during the class. Both teachers dealt quite naturally with these children without making any special effort. The slow learner in class V was given some small tasks like delivering the register to the next classroom, getting water or putting the benches in order. The boy can write the alphabet, a few words and basic numerals. He speaks but is not fully coherent. The headmistress, who teaches this class, herself has a special-needs child and is therefore, quite sensitive to this one. Both teachers however, felt that specialised teachers are required to help these children. Even with training they felt they might not be able to do justice to the special requirements of the children.

In both classes it was observed that the teachers were mobile, moving around the classroom and making eye contact with the children, especially the boys. An effort was made to call on both boys and girls to answer questions. However there was a clear expression of appreciation when boys gave correct answers. Girls were often exhorted to speak up and, in some cases, overlooked when they tried to give answers. Both teachers tended to stand closer to the boys, especially in the higher classes, which meant that the girls had to peer backwards to get a glimpse of the teacher.

It was also observed that the male teacher, inhibited no doubt by our presence, was trying to curb his instinct to give the children an occasional whack.

We were informed that DPEP in Warangal had utilised the Rs 500 per teacher earmarked for providing teaching aid kits for language, science and maths. In addition, storybooks had also been provided. However these kits have not been used at all in PS-II where they remain unopened in their original packing. In PS-I the male teacher said he had used the math kit initially. The storybooks have yet to see the light of day.

During discussions with teachers there was a tentative response as to the use of these kits. The inability to use them was ascribed to lack of space, time and the generally distracted atmosphere in the school that was attributed to its proximity to the bus stop.

Here a brief word is in order about the role of the mandal resource group that, in Andhra Pradesh, substitutes for the block/cluster resource centre. In the mandal where the micro study was done, there are three resource persons. Discussions with teachers did not reveal any information on whether the resource persons provide them with any academic support. Their role seems to be more supervisory or inspectorial in nature, of checking enrolments in the school and non-residential centre.

DISCUSSION WITH CHILDREN OF CLASS IV/V

A focus-group discussion was conducted after school hours with nine girls and 13 boys of classes IV and V in the school after the teachers had left. There was a lot of curiosity about this meeting. Smaller children, women and youth were hovering around the windows hoping to get an inkling of what was being discussed. Though we tried to meet the girls separately it was soon evident that this would not be possible. We therefore settled for a mixed group discussion. As in the classroom the girls sat on one side and the boys on the other. There was however, one main difference from the classroom behaviour observed—during our discussion the girls were as vocal and forthright as the boys.

Since child labour and household work has often tended to impede children's ability, particularly of girls, to access school, the discussion started off with what the children do before coming to school. Most said they do some work but manage to come to school by the stipulated time of 9 a.m. However one girl was perpetually late as she had a lot of house-work to do before coming to school. The kinds of work the children do was listed by them as follows:

- Seven girls and 11 boys fetch water everyday, once before and once after school. Each time it takes them around 30 minutes to bring the water. This is despite the fact that the village has a protected drinking water system in place. However either the water is not enough or it is not supplied at all, especially to SC households located at the end of the village.
- Six girls and six boys said they wash clothes, collect firewood and graze cattle before coming to school.
- Except for two boys, all others are engaged in agricultural work. Seven girls and two boys said that they go to the fields every Sunday. All except two work in the fields on holidays. They earn Rs 25 per day, which they hand over to their mothers, who in turn give them small amounts for sweets, ribbons, etc.

Of the 22 children, six have TV at home and one has a radio.

All the children said they come to school after eating some rice and chutney, which frequently comprises ground red chillies and salt. One boy stated that 'even if we have to bear with hunger, we must come to school'. Our field visit observations confirmed that the children indeed eat some rice before coming to school.

When asked about schooling, two boys and five girls claimed they had attended the non-residential bridge centre classes during the summer months. One girl reported that she had studied class I in a private school. One girl's brother is studying in the private school. The slow learner's two brothers are also in a private school.

When asked about who cleans the classrooms, all the children said that the slow learner cleans the rooms and fetches water that he then stores in the two pots in the classrooms. This contradicted our experience during the four days of field observation when the *ayah*, who had earlier been hired by the ECE centre, cleaned the classroom.

The children said they usually drank water from the hand pump just outside the ECE centre, though they admitted to occasionally drinking from the pots that are mainly used by teachers in the classroom. It was difficult to determine whether the children had actually been prohibited from using the water kept in the classrooms.

Most children play in front of the school. There are no organised games except on special occasions like Independence Day. Boys like to play cricket, kabaddi, kho-kho; the girls skip, play hopscotch, kho-kho and kabaddi. There were all quite clear that cricket is a boy's game though some girls tentatively said that they too would like to play cricket.

All felt that the seating arrangement in the classroom with girls sitting in front and boys at the back, was natural and right. Most liked science classes since the books provided contained pictures of parts of the body. Many felt maths was difficult.

In class the teacher usually reads the lesson first, then the children read it aloud. The teacher explains the meaning and writes difficult words on the board. After two or three days there is a question-and-answer session on the lesson. Sometimes games and role-plays are used. The children were very vague on this issue indicating that this is a rare activity. They would like more role-plays in the classroom. Though the teachers had said that occasionally the children are given storybooks to read, the children reported that this did not happen. The discussion with children also suggested that the various teaching kits provided are also not used regularly. A lot of prodding was necessary for them to remember that in maths class the teacher had indeed used various cutouts to explain fractions and shapes.

Vis-à-vis corporal punishment the children reported that in class V students are beaten if they do not pay attention. However, as one of them said, they do not cry since there are younger children in the classroom. From the children's responses and their interactions with the teacher observed outside the classroom, they did not appear to be afraid of the teachers.

THE TEACHERS

Both primary schools have three teachers each to handle classes I to V. PS-I in the SC colony has a headmistress, who has been working in this school for the past six years. (Her term is co-terminous with DPEP in the village.) There are two other teachers—one male and one female—who have been working for the last three years. The female teacher was on maternity leave.

Both teachers we met have a Bachelor's degree in education and have been working in the education field for nearly 20 years. Both have received in-service training, especially under DPEP. The headmistress has received training every year since 1997, totalling 22 days over the past five years. The male teacher has received training for 10 days since 1999. The training covered orientation to the DPEP programme objectives, teaching of Telugu and English, and more recently, the UEE focus in DPEP. The headmistress has also received training for the IED initiative on identifying special-needs children and integrating them into the school.

While both teachers considered the training to be useful, they were frustrated because they were unable to apply all methods in the classroom due to problems of space and insufficient number of teachers. Both felt that the syllabus was too large for them to use child-centred methodologies and yet be able to complete it in time.

We were informed that the major focus of training of teachers and mandal resource persons has been on understanding the context of children's lives and the factors in the family and community that hinder their participation in education. The envisaged role of the teacher is also of a social activist, to bring children into the school system.

The teachers of PS-I were sharply aware of the role caste and class factors play in determining facilities for the school. They were unequivocal in stating that PS-II stands to gain by virtue of its proximity to the high school as well as the fact that a majority of its students belong to the dominant BC group in the village. Consequently their school committee is stronger and therefore able to lobby for more benefits, better infrastructure, space, etc. This view was also expressed during discussions with the community in the SC colony.

Both teachers felt that there is a marked change in social attitudes towards education of children. Parents now recognise the need and value of education. Nevertheless some pockets of resistance do persist and education of older girls is still a problem. While the number of bonded, out-of-school children has come down, this issue needs special attention. The teachers however, do not seem to see any proactive role for themselves in addressing this problem at this juncture, which is perceived more as the responsibility of the mobiliser and the teacher in charge of the NRBC.

Since the school is right at the entrance of the village the teachers do get to talk to the parents sometimes. During special campaigns for instance, the headmistress said she used to go to every house to talk to the parents. However her interactions with the community were more frequent during the first three years of DPEP. These gradually reduced with the formation of the school committees and the appointment of the social mobiliser.

THE SCHOOL EDUCATION COMMITTEE (SEC)

In accordance with the statutory requirement a SEC for PS-I is in place with four members, two men and two women. This is the second committee formed in 2000. The four members were unanimously elected. The chairperson is a man while the headmistress serves as the convener. The SEC has been given a one-day orientation at the mandal level. It is

supposed to meet every month but this committee has only met three times in the last one year.

Since panchayat elections were announced during the field study the SEC chairman could only meet with us very briefly. The women members are active but view lobbying with the government and with mandal officials outside the village as being the chairman's responsibility.

It was reported that the SEC has been active in improving the infrastructure of the school. The committee used the school improvement fund along with contributions from parents to buy some benches and almirahs, get electricity for the school and for celebrations on special days such as Independence Day. It also succeeded in having an extra room constructed using money sanctioned from the mandal's general fund. It is currently waiting for DPEP to sanction the Rs 2 lakh required to build two additional rooms. The local MLA has agreed to underwrite the cost of repairing the community hall attached to the school. The committee feels that improvement of the building is crucial since last year 10 families transferred their younger children to a private school as PS-I had no space, the additional room lacked a pucca floor and the children were falling ill.

Except for the committee's participation in mobilising child labour children to join the NRBC during the campaigns, the SEC primarily saw itself as being responsible for improving the school. School attendance and the quality of teaching did not seem to be part of their worldview. The general feeling among teachers was that the SEC does not provide them any real support; it only wants to supervise them.

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

Group discussions were also held with self-help group members, men and women in the village and a group of young men. For all of them the school and children's education was of considerable concern. They felt that over the past five or six years the number of parents wanting to educate their children has increased. Everyone felt that both boys and girls should study up to college level so that they can get a job.

People also expressed concern about the poor facilities offered by PS-I which they felt were in sharp contrast to those offered by PS attached to the high school. Both the SEC of PS-I and the community members felt that their school is neglected because it is in the SC colony. Further there was a feeling that the SEC of the other school was more powerful because its members belong to the dominant caste group in the village.

The people's perception of the role that they as a community can play appeared to be unclear and fuzzy. Improving the school and ensuring that all children go to school were seen as the responsibility of the government, teachers, social mobiliser and SEC.

All the groups we interacted with had a clear picture of what a school ought to be like. It should be clean and spacious, with a compound wall and gate. People should not be allowed into the school at all times. Each class should have its own teacher. The teachers should be strict and disciplined and use corporal punishment if necessary. What came across clearly was the wide spread acceptance of the importance and significance of education for children. This was a view shared and expressed even by those parents who were sending their children to work and not to school.

CONCLUSION

What are the current issues of equity in Chemurapalli? Access takes on a new meaning with two primary schools and one private school in the village. Perceptions of what a good school should be are being formed. The well-off SCs prefer to send their younger children to the private school and are willing to pay the requisite fees, not only because they regard this as a status symbol but also because they hope that their children would be able to learn some English. There is little concern about the quality of teaching. They are more interested in whether the school imparts discipline or whether each class is assigned a separate teacher. They believe that if a school is charging a fee it must be hiring better teachers—something that is not borne out at all by our observation of the private school where all the teachers are untrained. As already mentioned above this is a paradox that needs to be understood better.

The physical presence of a school within one's locality or special initiatives for out-of-school children do not automatically address the issues of child labour or older girls in the 11-plus age-group. While it is widely acknowledged that the root causes of these problems are located within the wider system and would require more than innovative and progressive educational interventions, the problems of enabling convergent action have not yet been fully and squarely addressed. At Chemurapalli there was little evidence of any group or groups working out strategies to address the issues. There seemed to have been very few efforts made to rope in the support of an NGO that works in the village to organise women into self-help groups, to further conscientise and empower the women's groups to address the issue of child labour or the education of older girls.

Within the classroom, equity issues have yet to be resolved. While the first step has been taken to ensure that all children, including those with special-needs, are brought into the school, the needs of slow learners and children with special-needs have yet to be met. Teachers are not equipped and, in some cases, do not see the need to pay special attention to such children. Except in the case of special-needs children, the teachers seem to be unaware of the differential learning abilities of children in the classroom.

Having a high school within the village has made a difference in access to secondary education, particularly among girls and children of poorer families. Discussions with teachers highlighted that attendance and achievement levels continue to be problematic for these children, both boys and girls. Since there is a no-detention policy unrelated to attendance all children move up to class VII and subsequently to class X after the board exam in class VII, thus masking the real issues of learning and achievement.

There is a clear hierarchy in people's minds about the two primary schools in Chemurapalli. They feel that the PS in the main village is superior and better maintained since it is patronised by the dominant BC group in the village. Even in visual terms, the PS in the SC colony is small and poorly maintained; the extra room that has been constructed is also makeshift, with a roof that leaks and an unfinished floor. The teachers and the community feel that no one pays attention to this school as it is in the SC area. Even its SEC does not feel as empowered as the other school's committee to ensure that at least the basic infrastructure is assured. This is seen as part of the general discrimination faced in society.

The system of each school having its own school committee has been counterproductive to the interests of the school in the SC colony. The panchayat education committee meant to bring together members of all SECs under the chairmanship of the sarpanch has never met. Teachers of all the schools in the village feel that this system is not viable. The teachers and the SEC of PS-I were categorical about the need to merge all the SECs into one in order to ensure that the school in the SC colony also receives its due share of attention.

A final word on the role of the community in primary education. The creation of different structures such as the SEC and the appointment of a social mobiliser have resulted in responsibility for ensuring enrolment and retention being pinned on one person or one structure. As a result teachers view their role in this process as being very limited. The awareness generation campaigns that were effective in the initial phases of DPEP in

mobilising the community have not led to empowering the larger community to play a proactive role in education. Programmatically too, this responsibility is being seen as vested with the various structures set up under DPEP. The larger issue of the community at large owning the responsibility for children's education needs to once again become the focus of community level strategies.

NOTES

1. We gratefully acknowledge the full and enthusiastic support we have received from the DPEP Directorate in Hyderabad and the Warangal project office. It is to the children of PS-I however, that we are most indebted for providing us with insights into their experience of primary education in their world. To the teachers and the community members of Chemurapalli village, our special thanks for sharing their views and patiently answering all our questions and clearing our doubts. This micro study is a worm's view from below and makes no claim to being a thorough study of DPEP in Andhra Pradesh.
2. Personal communication from Director DPEP, January 2002 when the micro study was being revised.

13 THE WEFT AND WARP OF PUBLIC EDUCATION: A TALE OF TWO PRIMARY SCHOOLS, CUDDALORE DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU¹

Aruna Rathnam

In my ideal school, you won't find students ... they will be out in the fields, in public places, meeting and talking to people....

Mr R, teacher in Mallimedu

This is a descriptive report of two primary schools in a single panchayat in Cuddalore district with specific focus on the issues of gender and social equity. To achieve the aim of 'reducing differences in enrolment, dropout and learning achievement between gender and social groups to less than 5 per cent' (DPEP 2000j: 5), DPEP has devised several strategies. By examining how these strategies are woven into the fabric of existing public education, the micro study attempts to look at the texture of this weave.

Physical access to a primary school is a crucial condition for enrolment; in Tamil Nadu 99.4 per cent of the population had access to a primary school within a kilometre of their habitation in 1993 (Aggarwal 2000a: 235). In the case of Nallur (the specific panchayat chosen for this study) also, physical access has been achieved. Other details such as infrastructure, pedagogical practices, community involvement and attitude to gender are therefore foregrounded in this report.

THE SETTING

Cuddalore district (then part of South Arcot) was chosen for the implementation of phase I of DPEP because at 38.4 per cent the female literacy rate of the district was lower than the national average, according to the 1991 Census (DPEP 2000e: 4). The percentage of dalit population in the district is 36.4 per cent (Aggarwal 2000a: 235).

Nallur Panchayat is in a block in Cuddalore district in Tamil Nadu. With a total population of 3,270,² Nallur is divided into three wards; the second ward is a dalit habitation called Mallimedu about 850 metres from the other two wards. There are two primary schools—a Panchayat Union Primary School (PUPS) in the first ward and the second in Mallimedu set up under the aegis of the Adi Dravida Welfare Board (ADWB) of the Tamil Nadu government. Nallur also has a functioning government high school.

The main occupation of the villagers is agriculture, though a few people are employed in the nearby towns. The area is irrigated with ground water through pump-wells. The main crops are sugarcane, groundnut, cotton and paddy. Much of the land is owned by the upper castes; a Hindu *math* owns about 70 acres. Some of the villagers cultivate this land as tenant farmers.

The area around Nallur has a history of caste clashes between dalits and the upper castes. In 1989 a dalit habitation in a village nearby was burnt down totally and the affected dalits moved to Mallimedu. In response to requests from the community a primary school was started in Mallimedu by the ADWB in the academic year 1999–2000 (henceforth ADWBS).

This school had a thatch roof and lattice windows made of bamboo. It caught fire in June 2000. Though subsequently repaired by the people of Mallimedu with the help of the state government, the school continues to function in this structure. The pucca building that has been built is yet to be opened for use.

The infrastructure facilities of both these schools are listed in Table 13.1. These aspects of infrastructure affect the physical and academic environment of the schools and the well being of students. The ADWBS seems to have some features predominantly associated with the less attractive alternate schools—a single-teacher in a multi-grade setting, a single room with minimum TLM (or TLM that are not age-appropriate), no library and dependence on local volunteers in the absence of the

TABLE 13.1
Infrastructure of the primary schools in Nallur and Mallimedu

	Nallur PUPS		ADWBS, Mallimedu	
	Current	New	Current	New
Building structure	pucca	–	kuccha	pucca
Toilets for students	No	Yes*	No	Yes
Toilets for teachers	Yes	–	No	Yes
No. of classes	1 to 5		1 to 5	
No. of rooms	5		1	1
Co-educational	Yes		Yes	
No. of teachers	7		2**	
Multigrade teaching	No		Yes	
Blackboard, chalk	Yes		Yes	
TLM prepared under DPEP				
training/incentive	Yes		No	
Midday meal	Yes, adequate		Yes but only for 53	
Midday meal asst.	Yes		Yes	
Library	Yes		No	
Storage space for TLM, records	Yes		No	No
Drinking water	Yes***		Yes	Yes
Playground	No		No	No

Source: Notes from fieldwork.

Notes: *The new toilets, one for boys and one for girls, do not have a water connection; the panchayat is unable to collect the money necessary for this.

**The second teacher (on deputation) arrived in the last days of July 2001. The single teacher since 1999 is also on deputation.

***Water testing kit provided by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) proved the water to be non-drinkable. Students have been advised to fetch water from a tap 200 metres away from the school.

teacher.³ These aspects to a great extent determine parents' choice when they have choices, as they do in this panchayat.

WHO GOES TO WHICH SCHOOL?

The Nallur PUPS is at the southern end of the main road of the ur,⁴ while the ADWBS is well inside Mallimedu. As Tables 13.2 and 13.3 show, while SC children avail of either school, the BC and MBC—but not the OCs—attend Nallur PUPS. Further, Mallimedu is nearly a kilometre away from the Nallur bus stop and no buses stop at Mallimedu. Hence accessing the ADWBS proves to be difficult for young children who live in the ur. Besides, many parents cite infrastructure facilities,

TABLE 13.2
Nallur PUPS: Household survey of wards 1 and 3
(5+ to 9+ only; up to 30 June 2001)

	SC M + F	ST M + F	BC M + F	MBC* M + F	OC** M + F	Total M + F	Grand Total
Total population	225 + 224	8 + 5	272 + 262	597 + 626	33 + 27	1,135 + 1,144	2,279
5+ to 9+ children	35 + 22	1 + 0	23 + 26	62 + 75	3 + 0	124 + 123	247
In this school	25 + 21	1 + 0	11 + 15	54 + 60	0 + 0	91 + 96	187
Outside school	4 + 1	0 + 0	12 + 11	7 + 10	3 + 1	26 + 21	47
Not in any school	6 + 1	0 + 0	0 + 0	1 + 5	0 + 0	7 + 6	13
From outside***	25 + 20	0 + 0	6 + 1	14 + 5	0 + 0	45 + 26	71
Total in this school	50 + 41	1 + 0	17 + 6	68 + 65	0 + 0	136 + 122	258

Source: Household survey data records maintained by the Nallur Panchayat Primary School

Notes: *Most Backward Caste.

**Other Castes (forward castes).

***From outside the panchayat limits.

TABLE 13.3
Students enrolled in Nallur PUPS, 2001-02

Class	Enrolled B + G	On 10-07-01 B + G	SC B + G	ST B + G	MBC B + G	BC B + G	Comments
IA	10 + 7	8 + 6	9 + 7	-	10 + 7	2 + 1	IA and B combined
IB	11 + 8	9 + 5					No OCs at all.
IIA	13 + 13	13 + 13	11 + 11	-	10 + 15	3 + 1	IIA and B combined
IIB	11 + 14	11 + 12					No OCs.
III	22 + 18	21 + 18	10 + 6	-	7 + 10	5 + 2	No OCs.
IVA	20 + 17	20 + 17	15 + 11	-	21 + 15	4 + 8	IVA and B combined
IVB	20 + 17	20 + 16					No OCs.
VA	16 + 13	16 + 13	6 + 6	1 + 0	20 + 18	3 + 4	VA and B combined
VB	14 + 15	13 + 15					No OCs.
Total	137 + 122	131 + 115	51 + 41	1 + 0	68 + 65	17 + 16	259* on the rolls.

Source: Consolidated record of admission and attendance maintained by the school.

Note: * This number is at variance from the number in Table 13.1.

teacher availability and adequate midday meal supply as reasons for preferring the Nallur PUPS.

There are no alternate schools here as there is no daylong paid work available for children. So almost all children do attend school in both habitations. The GER for Nallur in 2000–01 is 94.7 per cent, which compares less favourably with the district level GER of 102.4 per cent (DPEP 2000c: 4). In terms of out-of-school children, 5.2 per cent of the 5–9 year age-group falls under this category in Nallur.

Though Nallur PUPS annually runs enrolment campaigns with the help of members of the women's SHGs, the PTA and the VLC, 13 children in the age-group of 5–9 years are out of school (Table 13.2). Seasonal migration of some families is cited as a reason for this. Except for two girls we could not trace the other 11 children in this group. One of the girls is unable to speak and the other is 'mentally retarded'. Both had been enrolled but were withdrawn by the parents after four years in the first case and three years in the second.

Most children studying in 'outside schools' go to fee-charging matriculation⁵ schools in the nearest town which is 4 kilometres away. They travel by van. A few children go to government primary schools in nearby panchayats. The specifics of who attends which kind of school were difficult to determine except in the case of three OC children who are enrolled in a matriculation school in the town.

The vans and buses of the two matriculation schools in the nearest town ferry children from various villages in the area (the farthest village is as far away as 15 kilometres). The schools could not provide details about students from specific villages or social groups as they do not record these in the attendance registers. Though this kind of information is included in the admission files, due to logistical problems we could not access it within the time frame of this micro study.

The pupil teacher ratio (PTR) in Nallur PUPS is 37, which is slightly higher than the district level PTR of 36 (DPEP 2000c: 4). The presence of seven teachers, apart from enabling a teacher per class, also helps in creating TLM and sharing of workload without affecting actual instruction. Also, the community regards the presence of an adequate number of teachers in a school as an asset.

Though Table 13.4 does not mention any children in the 5–9 years age-group studying in other schools, during fieldwork we found that five children were attending a matriculation school in the nearby town. Two of them had been withdrawn from the ADWBS in the past two years

while the rest had been enrolled in the matriculation school from class I.

TABLE 13.4
Number of children in Mallimedu, 5+ to 9 age-group

SC	M + F	Total
Total population	501 + 491	991
Number of 5+ to 9 children	59 + 27	86
Studying in this school	51 + 32*	83**
Non-enrolled	1 + 1	2

Source: Monthly return for June 2002 filed at the BRC.

Notes: *This figure is at variance from the figures from the attendance register at the school: see Table 13.5.

**There are two (1 boy and 1 girl) ST children studying in the school—they are not included in this table.

Of the two out-of-school children in Mallimedu, we were told that their families had migrated but we could not confirm this. In the absence of detailed information regarding all these children, it is difficult to classify them under the usual headings of dropout and non-enrolled.

TABLE 13.5
Students enrolled in Adi Dravida Welfare Board School, Mallimedu, 2001–02

Class	Boys	Girls	Total	Comments
I	9	9	18	SC 8 + 8 = 16; ST: 1 + 1
II	9	5	13	All SC
III	18	6	24	All SC
IV	13	7	20	All SC
V	10	0	10	All SC
Total	59	27	85	SC: 83; ST: 2

Source: From the attendance register 2001–02.

The ADWBS has been a single-teacher school in a multigrade setting since its inception in 1999. As the enrolment rose the PTR changed—the PTR was 54 throughout 2000–01 and 85 in June and July of 2001. Since August 2001, when an additional teacher was sent, the ratio has improved to 42. It should be noted that both teachers in the ADWBS are on deputation from other schools. Community members cite this as a disadvantage when they talk about the education of their children. Such facts become significant when we foreground social equity as an issue.

Despite the disadvantages of the ADWBS enrolment and retention rates there are comparable to those of the Nallur PUPS. Dropouts are minimal in both schools.

COHORT OF CLASS I OF 1998–99 IN NALLUR PUPS

We took the list of children who were in class I in 1998–99 and followed them to class IV in 2001–02. Except for three children who migrated in 1999–2000 all other children were in school, either in Nallur or Mallimedu or other schools in the area. We did not follow the new entrants from class II onwards. There was no detention policy in class I in 1998–99. We have marked the children whose educational status was not clear but whose families had moved away as ‘migrated’ in Tables 13.6 to 13.9. Of the 13 children detained in class II, 12 continue to study in ADWBS while one girl has migrated.

TABLE 13.6
Cohort of 1998–99, Nallur PUPS

Caste/ Sex	Class I: 1998–99			Class II: 1999–2000			Class III: 2000–01				Class IV: 2001–02		
	CD	N	P	D	O/M	WB	P	D	O/M	WB	Now in Nallur	O/M	WB
SC boys	13	15	20	6	1/1	0	10	2	1/0	7	8	0/0	2
SC girls	5	18	15	4	2/1	1	12	1	0/0	2	9	0/0	3
MBC boys	5	12	16	0	0/1	0	16	0	0/0	0	16	0/0	0
MBC girls	5	8	10	3	0/0	0	9	1	0/0	0	9	0/0	0
BC boys	0	2	2	0	0/0	0	1	1	0/0	0	1	0/0	0
BC girls	1	7	7	1	0/0	0	7	0	0/0	0	6	1/0	0
Total	29	62	70	14	3/3	1	55	5	1/0	9	49	1/0	5

Source: Detention/promotion and attendance registers in Nallur PUPS.

Notes: CD: Detained from previous batch; N: New admissions; P: Promoted; D: Detained
O/M: Transferred to other schools and Migrated; WB: Transferred to ADWB
School in Mallimedu.

TABLE 13.7
Cohort of class I of 1999–2000, ADWBS, Mallimedu

Class I: 1999–2000		Class II: 2000–01					Class III: 2001–02			
		P	N	D	O	M	P	O	M	Total
Boys	27	19	0	8	0	0	17	2	0	17
Girls	12	7	1	5	0	0	7	0	1	7
Total	39	26	1	13	0	0	24	2	1	24

Source: Attendance and promotion registers, ADWBS.

Notes: P: Promoted; D: Detained; O: transferred to other schools; M: Migrated.

TABLE 13.8
Cohort of class II of 1999–2000, ADWBS, Mallimedu

	Class II: 1999–2000	To Class III: 2000–01				Class IV: 2001–02					Total
		P	N	D	O/M	P	D	CD	N	O/M	
Boys	10	10	2	1	0	11	0	1	1	0	13
Girls	2	2	4	0	0	6	0	0	1	0	7
Total	12	12	6	1	0	17	0	1	2	0	20

Source: Attendance and promotion registers, ADWBS.

Notes: P: Promoted; D: Detained; N: New admissions; CD: Detained from previous batch; O/M: Transferred to other schools or Migrated.

TABLE 13.9
Cohort of class III of 1999–2000, ADWBS, Mallimedu

	Admitted to Class III: 1999–2000	Class IV: 2000–01			Class V: 2001–02			
		P	N	CD	P	N	CD	Total
Boys	5	5	5	0	10	0	1	11

Source: Attendance and promotion registers, ADWBS.

Notes: P: Promoted; N: New admissions; CD: Detained from previous batch.

Of the 14 children who were detained in class II, 6 joined other schools (including the ADWBS in Mallimedu). The other eight continued in Nallur PUPS without detention in higher classes. Those detained in class III continued to study in Nallur. Since ADWBS only began functioning since 1999–2000, we followed the cohorts of classes I, II, and III from that year.

There are no girls in this batch at all. According to a community member the parents of girls preferred the Nallur PUPS where the annual financial incentive given by the Tamil Nadu government to SC girls from class III to class VIII is available. This incentive has not been allocated to ADWBS. Another community member said that there are no girls in that cohort at all. Considering the ratio of boys to girls in the age-group 5–9 years (59 to 27—see Table 13.2), this is quite possible.

The cohort analyses of both schools show that detention has not led to dropping out of school. When we talked to some of the students who had been detained we found that they seemed to take detention as a challenge to their ability. In Nallur PUPS five students who had been detained in class I said proudly that since then their records have shown steady improvement.

Both schools have adopted strategies to discourage children from dropping out. The teachers in Nallur PUPS have made arrangements for girls

to bring their younger siblings to school if necessary. They also encourage them to come in late if their household chores demand morning hours, especially during heavy labour seasons. Some teachers even stay back after school to help children who may have missed classes because of this.

In Mallimedu pressure from the community deters parents from keeping children away from school. The single teacher there is able to send them word through other children or community members. One of the young men who help out with the school is willing to follow up absentees—after school hours he visits the parents and persuades them to make alternate arrangements for the household duties usually performed by the children.

As Vaidyanathan and Nair (2001: 41) point out, 'Social movements can make a difference by making adults more aware of the importance of education and inducing a greater degree of interest in sending children to school.' In Mallimedu the active presence of Dalit Panthers and the politicisation of some members of the community seem to have raised awareness among the whole community about the importance of education. Some community members thus cite it as a significant factor in promoting the community's involvement with the school.

The teachers of both schools also credit SHGs for the high rate of enrolment and retention at the primary level. For the past four years SHG members have been participating enthusiastically in enrolment campaigns launched at the beginning of every academic year. Clearly the DPEP strategy of involving the local community in primary education has been utilised fruitfully by the teachers.

Tamil Nadu's social welfare schemes probably also play a role in keeping children in school. Apart from the midday meal, uniforms and books are given to primary school students. Though there are complaints about the quality and fit of the uniforms one set per student is issued every year. Textbooks arrive on time and in appropriate quantities. Medical camps are routinely organised and children are issued individual medical records. There are also health and hygiene camps held regularly in schools. The Nallur PUPS has certainly benefited from these medical and health camps. Incentives of Rs 500 per year are provided to SC and MBC girls from classes III to VIII for successful completion of each academic year. Again Nallur PUPS has made this available to its SC female students—however, it has not extended the incentive to MBC girls. In addition, special coaching for these girls had been organised in most government schools. Though such coaching has been currently discontinued and the incentive scheme for SC girls is also not available in the ADWBS, parents are aware of the

schemes and expect teachers to ensure their implementation in the near future.

Let us look at other factors that bear directly on the quality of education, gender and social equity.

CLASSROOM PROCESSES

If we interpret access as the distance between students' daily lives and what is imparted in classrooms as 'knowledge', modes of traversing this distance become extremely important. How teachers internalise pedagogic principles and apply them play a key role in making 'school knowledge' students' own knowledge. We attempted to unravel these tangled threads through a combination of classroom observation and interviews with teachers and students. It must be noted that longer sessions of observations were more helpful in interacting with teachers and students and in understanding the mix and match of various strategies in classroom situations.

Since the inception of DPEP several excellent in-service training sessions have been held for teachers. Joy of learning (though in some places it preceded DPEP), activity-based training, training in teaching English, competency based learning, TLM preparation, model preparation, integrated education, training for headmasters/headmistresses (HMs), women's education and coordinators' training were listed by the teachers of Nallur PUPS. Joy of learning, according to the HM of PUPS, remains the basic pedagogic principle of this school.

In both schools one could feel the impact of 'joy of learning' training sessions. Children sang cheerfully with full-throated ease, used TLM with competence and care and were unafraid to seek help from peers or friendly teachers. The Nallur PUPS has a great amount of TLM that is constantly kept within the view of the students—charts, maps and flashcards adorn the walls and ceilings of four classrooms. That many students are acquainted with individual items of the TLM was clearly reflected in their prompting of teachers at appropriate junctures during class.

Of the seven teachers in Nallur, Mr U, Ms J and Ms C were enthusiastic about the in-service training sessions and keenly aware of the difference they had made in their teaching styles. They used the TLM actively and were proud of the fact that most items on display were made by them. They knew which kinds of TLM were available readily in the classroom and which were stored where for easy retrieval. All of them hid the TLM and other materials they brought to the specific classes from the students'

view and clearly enjoyed the expression of surprise and joy on their faces when an item was pulled out of a bag at the appropriate moment. All three mixed songs, activities, TLM, lectures and demonstrations judiciously, both during the observation lessons and at other times. The examples they used were largely from the local context. Their teaching style consisted of a number of exchanges with the students during which they were closely watchful of the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. Students talked to them easily and appeared to be less distracted.

These teachers were able to reflect on the pedagogic principles of various teaching methodologies. They were clear about why they used a particular methodology at a particular point during instruction time. Mr U talked about the disadvantages of activity-based teaching as far as teachers and students of rural schools are concerned. He pointed out that parents are often suspicious when their wards ask for things to take to school, especially produce from the fields. 'They think it is for the teachers and talk about how well teachers are paid while they toil in the fields to produce vegetables or grains,' he laughed.

Ms J was unhappy about how there is very little practical activity for the 'harder parts' of social sciences in classes IV and V, especially for the concept of representative democracy. She also said that these methods demand a high degree of preparation and teacher's energy, yet considered it well worth the effort when children understand the concept. Very often children participate enthusiastically in the concerned activity but fail to understand the concept behind it. She felt that not enough attention is being paid to slow learners during activities. Ms C shared this concern too. However, while admitting that slow learners needed more attention, she claimed that she was more drawn by enthusiastic students who complete an activity successfully. 'They (the quick ones) come to you with such joy, it is impossible not to smile. Then you turn to the slower ones, and their faces show so much disappointment that you stop smiling....'

It was also clear that some teachers are still not accustomed to using visual aids. Mr F decided to 'show' me his class and chose to 'do a lesson' on the senses. He brought with him a mango, a guava, a few jasmine flowers and some weeds. The students were able to see all these things. He then wrote the names of the five senses on the board. A girl, taller than the rest of the children, was asked to read them aloud with a pointer in hand. The other children were asked to repeat after her:

We see with our eyes.

We hear with our ears.

We taste with our tongue.

We smell with our nose.

We feel with our skin.

After she had repeated these sentences twice Mr F asked a boy to come up to the table. The boy was asked to close his eyes. Mr F thrust the mango under his nose and asked, 'What is this?' The children whispered, 'Mango, mango'. The boy answered, 'Mango, sir.' Another boy was asked to smell the guava in a similar manner. A third boy was asked to smell the jasmine. Each time, the other children around whispered the name of the object loudly.

Mr F asked the boys to go back to their seats. Then he asked the class, 'Were their eyes closed when they smelt the fruits and the flowers?' The class chorused, 'Yes, sir.' 'So you understand from this, your nose can tell you what the object is, without your eyes seeing it.'

The lesson came to an end with this demonstration. During the rest of the period children were asked to read this lesson aloud, followed by another lesson from the Tamil text (the tall girl again stood up and read aloud), then to write their names with initials 10 times on their slates (and show them to me), and following that, to write numbers from one to 100 (again, to show me). I later learnt that the tall girl had been detained from the previous year. The students also told me that the lesson on senses had been 'done earlier' without fruits or flowers.

Mr F had attended a training session on joy of learning. When asked to explain what it meant, he said, 'More activity by children, learning by doing, singing songs, less lessons.' When I asked him if he taught a fewer number of lessons when he used joyful learning methods, he said, 'No, I mean I speak less.' When I pressed him to give an example of learning by doing that he might recently have used in his class, he confessed that he does not use these methods too often.

Mr S, who sings beautifully, prides himself on his ability to train students to dance and do drill. His students are able to add and subtract single digit numbers, both mentally and on paper. Almost all of them form their letters clearly and copy without too many mistakes. Girls and boys sit alternatively in a circle. This seems to be his preferred arrangement, for even before he enters the class (on days other than the observation class) the children begin to seat themselves in this fashion. They sing more songs than other classes and sing clearly. They also seem to have picked up his enunciation which is very good and crisp.

He uses TLM, but sparingly. While he believes in training children both in curricular and co-curricular skills he is not particularly choosy about his methods. He did not beat the children during the observation class, but at other times his classes resonated with the sound of his beatings for which he uses both the cane and his hands. The sobs of children could be heard outside. The day I interviewed him, there was a complaint lodged by a parent whose child he had beaten.

When I asked Mr S about this, his first reaction was, 'I don't beat too much.' When I pointed out that I heard the sounds of sobbing, he said that 'I beat only to correct. I don't do anything against my conscience. Beating them makes them behave. When I teach them to sing or dance, I don't beat them.'

His colleagues were aware of Mr S's use of the cane. One of them justified it by saying that he is a strict teacher and no student had left his class without a thorough grounding in the basics.

Mr D's teaching consisted of writing the letters of the alphabet on the board, making the children recite them in chorus, and then write them out both on the blackboard and on their slates. A similar exercise was conducted for numbers. During these exercises he hardly ever made eye contact with individual students. He is often found outside his classroom in the high school area or at the entrance to the school ground. Most of his afternoons are spent napping, while the children amuse themselves within the classroom.

When I asked him about his teaching methods, he was reluctant to talk about newer methods—he was comfortable with the old style of teaching, but unwilling to admit this. When I asked him about his sleeping, he said, 'I am old, you know. I feel completely drained by lunchtime. But my children don't make noise, do they?'

Mr D did not remember attending any in-service training workshop in the past year; however, Mr U, who was passing by, reminded him of two that he 'was sent to'. When I asked him what he thought of joy of learning, he said, 'Humorous education. It is activity based, so saves the teacher's voice in classroom. I sing a lot after this. It is compulsory for us to sing.'

It became clear from the interviews with the teachers that one half of the group does not want to learn from the other; young women teachers who eagerly attend in-service training sessions often find that many of their older male colleagues are unenthusiastic about 'learning' from them. Thus, dissemination of pedagogic methods and principles does not flow as evenly or smoothly within the system as was probably planned.

Mr R in Mallimedu was unable to use any of these methods—he had practically no TLM like flashcards or toys. He had made a few charts with the help of some students from the high school. However, these were not of immediate use since many of them were not age-appropriate. For example, one chart had a well-drawn portrait of Sir C.V. Raman, accompanied by a brief, biographical sketch of his life. None of the class V students had any idea about his accomplishments. Mr R's lectures were enlivened by his sense of humour and his gentle manner. His style was interactive and his engagement with the students was class-appropriate. When he was teaching class V the grammatical terms for vowel, consonant and syllabic sounds, he asked the class I students to write the letters of the alphabet and class II students to check if they were written correctly. He used songs to signal transitions in instruction. Students were engaged through a continuous set of questions. He hardly ever finished a sentence without a tag question.

Mr R did beat children, he said. Though not particularly happy with that, he was not sure if the students would behave without corporal punishment when it was warranted. He cited the use of curse words as an example. When older boys bullied younger ones, he did beat them. He wanted me to advise him on disciplinary measures other than beating when such things happened.

In the time he has been with the ADWBS, Mr R has attended only one in-service training session. He had to choose between attending the session and closing the school for a day if he did. It was not clear if the CRC coordinator had to nominate him to attend those held on Saturdays and/or Sundays. He did attend the CRC meetings held every month but found that the demonstration classes assumed a single classroom setting. Thus, many of his questions and problems as a single teacher in a multi-grade setting have remained unresolved. He has not received the Rs 500 for TLM either—the school from which he was deputed did not include his name in their list. He is unsure if he is authorised to nominate himself.

When I asked Mr R why he stayed on, he replied, 'Look at these children. What will they think if I didn't stay on? Dalit children have been neglected for thousands of years. Being a single teacher in a welfare school is considered to be a punishment posting by many teachers. I thought, let me take this as a challenge. I have worked in a school in Chidambaram where some teachers ridiculed my zeal as a young teacher. They said that I had ulterior motives in working for the (ADW) Board. Any time they wanted to criticise me, my community identity would come up. Having experienced a minority tag, I could put myself in these children's shoes.

No teacher wants to teach us, these kids would think....' He feels that he will not be able to live with himself if he did not do his job well.

As far as in-service training and other ways of support to teachers are concerned, it is clear that the educational system has neglected ADWBS. It has certainly not been responsive to the single teacher's problems. Such a systemic lapse leaves students vulnerable to the scruples of individual teachers. Without devaluing Mr R's ethical sense, one wonders how educational equity can be achieved under these circumstances.

GENDER IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

Mr F's classroom is the smallest room in the Nallur PUPS. It is narrow and longish and does not allow for a circular seating arrangement. The students sit in rows—rows of boys, a wide gap, and then rows of girls. When I asked him about mixed seating, he tried to make a joke of it: 'No government order on that, you know. Well, I never gave a thought to seating boys and girls together. This is a village, you know. They sit separately on their own.'

Similar rows were found in all except Mr S's classroom. All the other teachers said that they could have mixed boys and girls but repeated the point of the school's setting being rural. 'Village children, you know, they automatically segregate themselves.' Mr D said that it was 'Tamil culture'. However, I found that during the lunch break and in the games period lower primary children played together in mixed groups.

Chores around the school were divided strictly according to gender. Girls wielded the broom, washed dishes (water pot, glasses) and fetched water if the containers were small. Boys picked up stray bits of paper, carried large drums of water or heavy things, climbed heights when necessary, rang the bell, opened and locked the classrooms and ran errands outside the campus. The teachers were aghast when I suggested that the chores could be swapped. Ms Y finally told me that there is a folk belief that a boy wielding a broom would bring ill luck to a family or a place.

School assemblies were an exception; a girl and a boy led them alternatively.

There were also individual teacher-preferences—Mr F, Ms J and Ms C called upon neatly dressed girls more often. They also spoke more easily to them outside instruction time. Mr U preferred the tough-looking boys in class, while outside the classroom he spoke with equal warmth to most children. Ms Y preferred cleanly dressed students of both genders and avoided the scruffy-looking ones. Mr S and Mr D spoke harshly to all

children outside class except when they asked the students to fetch something.

Punishments, too, varied. I learnt from the older students of Nallur that Mr F canes students for all kinds of infractions but goes easy on the girls—just taps them lightly. Mr S does not care if it is a boy or a girl—to him discipline is discipline! Ms C and Ms J hardly beat anyone with their hands. They use canes, but sparingly. They never beat girls, but ask them to kneel or sit alone in a corner. Ms Y beats all children for behavioural infractions. For academic infractions by boys, she tells the better-performing girls to knock the boys' heads and asks, 'Aren't you ashamed to be knocked by a girl? Don't make mistakes. Study better.' Mr U rarely uses the cane or his hand—if he beats a student, everyone considers the offence to be a serious one.

Even the teachers' duties are affected by gender. While Mr D was asked to fetch lunch for a visitor, Ms J was asked to serve it. In meeting with visitors as a group the women teachers tended to sit at the back. Women teachers are generally responsible for floor level decorations while male teachers handle the decorations above shoulder level. The male teachers said that the women had better handwriting and made better-looking TLM. When a CRC meeting was to be held on a Saturday, Ms Y was asked to write some details on the blackboard and Mr S was asked to take care of the seating arrangement. Women teachers are usually not asked to stay on after 4 p.m. Once when Ms J stayed back with me till 4.45 p.m. to attend the focus group discussion with members of the SHG, Mr U escorted her to her house before he went home.

Visitors, too, are not spared this gendered treatment. The first day I went to Nallur alone, a class five boy was asked to escort me to the bus stop (which was 50 metres away). It was with great difficulty that I managed to convince the teachers that this was not necessary.

In Mallimedu students sit in separate rows of boys and girls. Though they all played together during lunch break and sat where they wanted to eat lunch, they got back to their rows once the bell rang. Ringing the bell, running errands outside the school and helping the midday meal workers to lift firewood and other heavy materials were chores assigned to the boys. Other chores were evenly distributed between the sexes—sweeping the classroom, distributing/collecting books or notebooks after correction, cleaning the board and supervising the assembly were all shared by groups of boys and girls of different classes. Girls said that Mr R never beat them with his hands. A light tap with a cane was all that they got. However, the boys were beaten.

Such gendered practices consist of the hidden curriculum⁶ though they go by the name of 'culture'. Far from being a leveller of differences school becomes the first official ground and the dominant public institution children encounter that reinforces these very differences. It was fascinating to hear the children's own interpretations of these practices (see the following section).

STUDENTS AND THE SCHOOL SETTING

Students of Nallur PUPS talked freely though boys were more vocal than girls. In every class I found that as many as 50 per cent of the students were unable to follow the lessons closely. The competence of these students in writing, reading and arithmetic was far below the expected level.⁷

In class IV, one row of girls and two rows of boys consisted of students who were considered 'weak'. All the students were aware of this—hardly any of these 'weak' students volunteered to do any academic task. If they did they were ridiculed, albeit mildly, by some of their 'better-performing' classmates. However, some of the 'better-performing' girls often helped their 'weak' classmates by prompting them in a stage whisper.

In class V a 'buddy system' has been officially introduced—and the students seem to like it. The class is divided into groups of five or six. In each group there is a 'good student', usually one who scores in the top 10 per cent of the class, two average students from the middle rungs of the percentage ladder and two or three 'weak' students whose marks do not reach the pass percentage, or linger close to it. Whenever class work was assigned, I found that students automatically drifted into these groups, which were mixed. Surprisingly, 'weak' boys were not particularly ashamed of being led by a 'studious' girl. A few 'weak' boys showed me their written work proudly and pointed to their group leader—'She helped me with this. She always scores 90 or 95 in maths.'

One group leader introduced a 'weak' student thus—'If you want any pictures drawn, you give it to Senthil. But you have to give him a model and don't ask him to write. He makes spelling mistakes.'

Students are also aware of the family background of their peers. I was sometimes asked by a more articulate or 'bold' student to talk to a shy or retiring one—'This is Murugesan. His father died last year. You see his shirt is torn—his mother is not able to buy him a shirt. You talk to him.' Or, 'Teacher, you meet Kamala. Her father works in Chennai. She wants to tell you about it.'

Many children from Nallur go to tuition classes run by unemployed young women. The more articulate students of classes IV and V said that the tuitions helped them to read and write better.

Students of classes IV and V were willing to talk about corporal punishment. Though they said that their teachers beat them only when they misbehaved, they steered clear of some teachers during lunchtime or between instruction time. Such teachers were often seen to box the students' ears casually if they strayed too close to them. They also spoke harshly to students when they found the latter in 'inappropriate' spaces—for example, near the HM's table or near the kitchen unit. Many students felt that these acts are unfair and confessed to avoiding these teachers.

Interestingly, all students—both in Nallur PUPS and Mallimedu—think that the word 'teacher' means a woman teacher. Whenever I referred to any male as teacher, I was promptly corrected—'That is a sir, not a teacher.' I found that this sense of the word prevailed among high school students too.

In both schools children talked about their chores, both in the school and at home. Many girls in classes IV and V claimed that they could cook a meal. They said that they fetched water, washed small items of clothing, swept and mopped the house and helped in cooking if their mothers were home. During the heavy labour season, i.e., harvest, weeding, or seeding, these girls cooked lunch and took it to their parents in the field. They said that they missed two hours of class in the morning during these times. A few with siblings below five said that they stay home for days during the labour season.

Many boys of classes IV and V also helped at home—their chores consisted of looking after the cattle, running errands such as going to shops or distributing milk and, in a few cases, fetching water. However the boys were clear that they would only carry buckets and not pots. They would collect and carry firewood but collecting dung cakes was 'girls' work'. Similarly, sweeping with a broom was said to be a girl's job. Only one boy said that he knew to how make rice and rasam—his peers immediately informed me that he did not have either a mother or a grandmother and so had to cook for himself, his father and his grandfather.

However they were not prejudiced against women doctors or female government officials. One boy was incredulous when we talked about policewomen. However a few who had seen policewomen, confirmed their existence. The same boy asked me if there were women in the army. The group disbanded discussing the idea of women soldiers.

Practically every articulate student wanted to know about my way of dressing and the fact that I did not wear jewellery. A few girls wondered whether this did not lead to me being mistaken for a man. Was I ashamed when that happened? Two boys told me that some men at the bus stop had asked them if I was a man or a woman. 'They can't see you closely, that's why they ask,' said one apologetically. Another explained, 'Yesterday you were wearing a man's shirt, that's why.'

All the children in Nallur seemed to like the idea of being touched in a friendly fashion—one boy told me that I was the only 'outsider' and 'teacher' who touched them, shook hands with them and talked to them about all sorts of things. I did not see many of the teachers touch the children in a casual, friendly way, except to adjust a belt or to pin the lapels of a shirt together.

In Mallimedu though, I found Mr R ruffling the hair of a few select older boys. With students of classes I and II he was more free, patting a lot of them in praise or in affection. Many children were fond of Mr R and responded to him with affection.

Here too, children questioned me freely about my dress and my bare ears and arms. I was greeted with enthusiasm and outstretched hands—if I failed to shake hands with one of them, someone in the group would remind me. Some told me that they would like to have a 'teacher', meaning a woman. Not that they did not like 'Sir', but if the next teacher could be a woman, then girls might study in the fifth class too. Students in classes IV and V seemed to be aware of the adults' appreciation of Mr R. They told me that he made learning 'easy'; he spoke 'clearly and did not confuse' them. They also told me that they dreaded going to the high school in Nallur where, they had heard, there are 'teachers with long switches'.

THE SCHOOLS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Women's SHGs in Nallur are not only active but are very clear about their role vis-à-vis education. 'We are to be the supporting structure for the school's growth and development,' declared one and all the others nodded in agreement. Many of them keep in touch with the HM through the year—their participation ranges from leading a procession of students to campaign for school enrolment, supplying students with sweets for school functions and persuading parents to make extra efforts to enhance their wards' academic performance, to demanding improved facilities for the school in panchayat meetings. Those who live close by allow the girls

in the school to use the toilets in their homes. They provide drinking water to the students and also talk other reluctant neighbours into extending these facilities to the children. A neighbour on the southern side of the school has been persuaded, by the combined efforts of the SHG members and the HM, to allow the children to play on a paved portion of his mill premises.

Members of SHGs have consistently backed the school's efforts to get local support for various infrastructure needs. As Ms Prema, an SHG member said, 'We want to ensure we have the best school in the area.' They have their own dreams for the school—a big playground 'for boys to play cricket and girls to play volleyball', spoken English and Hindi classes, computer classes, handicraft as part of the school curriculum 'at least for the girls so that they have a marketable skill' and toilets and drinking water for all students. Girls should be able to learn cycling, they add. 'If they try to learn in the ur, men ridicule and discourage them.'

Though the teachers and the HM are appreciative of the members of the SHGs, not all members of the community take a favourable view of their active role. Describing the enrolment procession they took out in June, SHG members re-enacted the insults they encounter from men on such occasions. 'All of us know the value of education, but the men can't bear the idea of us telling them to care for the school. They think they know everything and who are we to tell people about schools?' said Ms Y. Both she and the others claimed that the men often ignore their suggestions at the gram sabha meetings. Yet they forge ahead. 'It has taken us this long to feel comfortable to sit on a bench in front of the HM. Now that we have done this, we will not stop. We will make all of them take notice of us.'

The PTA, too, is active; they award prizes to rank holders and class toppers. They, too, argue for school improvement plans in gram sabha meetings. Many of them also attend school functions.

The VLC on the other hand hardly meets, partly because some of the members, designated as patrons of the school, live and work in Chennai. However, Mr U, the HM, is thoroughly appreciative of the role the VLC should ideally play, as are some of the teachers who live in and around Nallur. In fact Mr U goes to some trouble to keep the VLC members informed about the school's needs, concerns and events. He and Ms J, a resident of Nallur, meet individual members to discuss matters concerning the VLC. The husband of the VLC chairperson also visits the school(s) whenever he can and offers help.

So how do Mr U and Ms J 'show' the functioning of the VLC? How do they explain this kind of VLC to their superior officers? Do they need to explain at all?

Yes, they have to report on the VLC. After a round of discussions with individual members of the VLC, Mr U and Ms J write a report in the form of minutes of a meeting and circulate it among the members. They then make another round of individual visits. When all the members agree with the written draft, it is copied into the minutes book which is then circulated. Each member is expected to sign and pass it on to the others.

However, according to Mr U, his superiors' opinion is not what motivates him in his efforts to get the VLC to function. He explained this at length—before 1981 all panchayat union schools came under the direct supervision of the commissioner of the union. Teachers were thus under the local president's thumb. There were a number of problems including sexual harassment of women teachers and abuse of male teachers to do the personal work of the president. Those who did not comply were intimidated. The teachers' unions demanded that teachers be made government employees and this demand was met.

Once the teachers were no longer under direct local control, the local people lost interest in the schools themselves. Mr U feels that this has resulted in a poor environment for the students—not just physically but culturally and emotionally. He recalls his own teachers and village elders going around the village in the evenings to ensure that students were doing their homework. When his teachers did that they got full cooperation from the parents and the villagers. Good students were praised. This boosted the image of the school and in the long run it also motivated more villagers to enrol their children.

Now of course the government itself has decreed that local cooperation should be enlisted. Many teachers do not see the actual advantages that may accrue from this and end up putting on a show of local support. Though he had joined the union agitation against panchayat control of schools and actively fought for the teachers, the HM is of the opinion that pride in the local school is a key factor in bringing about educational improvement in rural areas.

Besides, as a non-resident, he relies on the locals to care for the upkeep and maintenance of the school. 'Without a compound wall cattle can stray in or anti-social elements can use this place. But our people do not allow such things to happen.' He also serves as a scribe to illiterate villagers and offers reference books to those who need them. He 'obliges' if villagers want him to find out specific (government) rules and regulations.

Despite all this he finds that most villagers do not attend school functions. Hardly any parents visit the school—many do not even see or sign the progress reports of their wards. ‘The only time I see some of them is at the end of the year, when their wards are detained,’ he said. So he stays on after school and visits the members of the VLC, the PTA and SHGs to discuss local issues, individual concerns, as well as issues connected to school.

The views of other teachers on the function of the VLC and the PTA varied. One senior teacher, Mr F, told me that the local people do not have enough resources to help with school improvement. Most of them are ‘poor’. Besides, ‘Isn’t the government responsible for infrastructure?’ he queried.

However Mr S, another senior teacher, felt that the school would perform better and the teachers would not shirk work if the VLC and the PTA were more active and visited the school on their own. He felt that the involvement of the members was not satisfactory and they knew only what the school chose to tell them.

Ms J, who grew up in Nallur and studied in the primary school where she teaches now, said that though involving the local people is in itself a sound concept, in the absence of practical ‘cooperation’ from them she finds the whole process rather tiresome. Though she is often stopped on her way to school and showered with complaints and questions, the villagers treat her suggestions for improvement with indulgence. ‘You are a young girl, what do you know?’ has been a typical response, especially in gram sabha meetings.

In Ms J’s opinion the physical environment of the school needs to be transformed. Such transformation cannot take place without local support in a big way. She cites the drain in front of the school as a case in point. ‘My ideal school will be a clean and verdant place with big trees and a playground for children to play in. It will have flowering plants and bushes that the children would tend. Such an environment is essential if the children are to develop a sense of pride in their native village and its school. When we can’t provide that, their self-esteem too gets damaged. We can’t blame them if they want to migrate to cities and are ashamed of their native places,’ she said.

The parents I met were happy with the academic performance of the school; many of them did not distinguish between the primary and the high school since both are on the same campus. However, they also acknowledged that they did not visit the school or meet the teachers as

often as they should. 'Our men go when there is some fight among children or if a teacher beats a child.'

In Mallimedu many villagers were unaware of the VLC. Mr R told me that many members of the VLC for Nallur PUPS, such as the chairperson, the village officer and ward members of the panchayat also served in the VLC for Mallimedu since it came under the same panchayat. The husband of the panchayat president did visit the school on a regular basis. However in Mallimedu there is a division between those who have moved there from the nearby village and those who are 'native' residents. There are also other divisions such as affiliations to different political parties and social movements. Mr R said that he had witnessed bitter conflicts over short-term PTA appointments.

The PTA has been energised since last year. With the burning of the school local squabbles seem to have taken a backseat and the PTA has been convened more regularly. However the members do not want to pay any dues to the Association and, therefore, its functioning is 'more a moral support, perhaps a fulfilment of norms on paper,' he said.

Even without the formal constitution of the VLC people in Mallimedu show a keen interest in the school. They speak highly of Mr R who has toiled in the school alone for two years. 'He manages to teach despite being the only teacher,' said a non-parent. 'All the first standard children know the alphabet already—just two months since they joined, you know?'

When a well-to-do family performs a special pooja in the Vishnu temple adjacent to the school prasadam is distributed to all the students. On birthdays of young children not yet enrolled, some parents distribute sweets to all the students in the school, demanding that the song 'Happy Birthday' be sung for the child.

During our observation, the new teacher was teaching maths to classes I and II under a tree. A middle-aged man approached and whispered something to him and then hid himself behind another tree. The teacher called on a boy and asked him to recite an English rhyme. The man grinned happily and clapped his hands, yelling to the passers-by, 'Do you hear my son? Listen, listen.' Volunteers and Mr R told me later that such occurrences are frequent. Parents in Mallimedu are fiercely proud of their children's schoolwork.

Many grandparents sing along as songs are being taught to the children as they go to and fro from the pump, fetching water. There are heated debates among the locals as to the wisdom of some of the educational practices—for example, should a child in class IV be encouraged to read

the newspaper? 'The newspapers contain vulgar pictures of starlets, write of violence and have graphic pictures. They are unsuitable for young minds,' was the verdict of a few elders. This group upbraided Mr R for encouraging students to read such newspapers.

Like Mr U, Mr R too serves as a scribe and an interpreter of official documents to the locals. Indeed, requests for help extend to borrowing his scooter or hitching a lift to the nearby main road. A few young people who have befriended him often help him out with his classes.

Mr R acknowledges the locals' interest in the school with gratitude. He recalls the 'horrible day' when the school was burnt down and he felt his 'heart was broken'. However, despite the squabbles among themselves, the locals stood by him in repairing the school building, in demanding compensation from the government and in appealing for additional teachers. The SHG women petitioned the district administration to appoint additional teachers, to improve facilities and for additional allocation of the midday meal. The downside of this is that Mr R often gets drawn into local disputes that he has no way of solving. He feels that he is under constant scrutiny and gets very frustrated and angry when he is accused of anti-dalit sentiments.

Teachers are often left to negotiate with local tensions with very little support or guidance from their superiors—those from towns feel particularly overwhelmed by the complexities of local customs, feuds and sentiments. However they cannot share their confusion with their colleagues as this gives rise to strong feelings. Caste-related issues for example, lie just below the surface—many teachers feel threatened and confused when confronted with them. Two middle-class teachers told me that they did not want their colleagues to know they were dalits. 'Some may already know, because of official papers, but I have indirectly told the HM no local person should know about it.'

A set of non-dalit teachers said that they failed to understand why the dalits wanted a school of their own. 'They' (the dalits) live just a kilometre away from Nallur. 'Their' children will be better educated in a school with sufficient number of teachers than in a single teacher school. 'During clashes we find it very difficult to travel. It affects all children, including theirs. But they stop the buses. They don't seem to care about their own kids.' They said that they have not talked about these issues to anyone else. 'All of them (their colleagues) are local people, they might feel that we folks from outside are judging them.'

A villager I spoke to felt that the weakest students in class 'always happen to be dalit children. Very often they also look bedraggled. They

get very little attention at home with their parents working in the fields all the time. When the parents get home in the evening they are too tired to see if their child needs to do homework or if her uniform needs washing or mending.' When I asked if the same situation was not true of all labourers' families regardless of caste, this villager claimed that in the ur, unlike in the 'colony', drunken behaviour on a daily basis is not tolerated. Besides relatives take the children to their own places when a father comes home drunk and begins to quarrel. This person speculated that it is possible that higher levels of alcoholism prevail among dalits and might well be the cause of the neglect of children.

Mr R, too, expressed a certain amount of concern and confusion about his dealings with the local people of Mallimedu. Whenever a community member is unhappy with Mr R, for whatever reason, his non-dalit identity is brought up. 'Sometimes I am afraid to do the right thing for fear of being accused of casteism,' he said. When he approached an officer to ask for advice, he was told, 'Oh, you come to the school every day, don't you? Very good! You don't worry about anything if you keep the school open every day.'

All this notwithstanding, there is a great deal of support for Mr R in Mallimedu. Two young men voluntarily teach a few lessons on a regular basis 'to help him out'. Some members of the local community feel that unlike other ADWB schools in rural areas, where even dalit teachers have not stayed on, Mr R has demonstrated his commitment to the children. His attendance record is near perfect, a fact that the locals are very appreciative of. In fact a local woman confessed to me after ensuring that no one was within earshot, 'He is so sincere. I wonder if one of "our" people would have been so regular....'

However while they are appreciative of Mr R, they are critical of the Board and its officials. They claim that no one came to see the school when it was burnt down till it got media attention. They also cite the unavailability of the incentive for SC girls in Mallimedu school as evidence of official indifference. They are angry that the school has had a single teacher for two years. 'Look at the way they have locked up the new building. The plaster is already peeling yet they haven't opened it. If their children were studying here, would they do this?' asked one woman.

They also claimed that the officials who visit the school in Nallur do not visit Mallimedu. When I pointed out that buses do not stop at Mallimedu and officials may find it inconvenient to visit, they immediately retorted, 'How did you come?' While other teachers go to meetings and trainings, Mr R never gets to attend them. 'How can they ignore such a

good teacher? If he gets trained, our children will benefit. But he cannot go without closing the school.' One person claimed that the same situation prevails in many rural schools, whether they are run by the Department of Education or the ADWB. Others agree. 'All their children study in matriculation schools in towns. So why would they worry about our children? Some of them probably think our children will compete with theirs if the education is of good standard.'

An official who asked to remain anonymous said that single teacher schools are few. In practice even two-teacher schools function with a single teacher for most of the time. 'The reasons are many. Sometimes the teachers themselves arrange with each other to attend the school one at a time; in other cases, one teacher might be a young woman, who goes on maternity leave and then on medical leave.' He also acknowledged that very often the demands of paperwork take up much of a teacher's time.

CONCLUSION

DPEP's strategies for enrolment drives have succeeded to a great extent—the communities in Nallur and Mallimedu willingly send their children to school. In fact, awareness about the importance of education is high—they want their children to study beyond the primary level.

Similarly there is very little resistance to educating girls. Though expectations of gender roles have not changed in the domestic sphere, as far as schooling is concerned, girls are expected to do well at all levels of education. Here too credit should be given to DPEP's focus on girls' education.

Regarding social groups, the very demand for a separate school, in my view, underlines the significance communities assign to schooling as an equaliser of social and systemic inequities. At the macro-level the systemic inequities are well recorded—in the local context, the backdrop of caste clashes continues to cast a shadow on the schools. How can a programme like DPEP deal with these systemic problems in a short span of six years?

Teacher training and individual teachers' commitment to raising quality alone cannot substitute for consistent social and political support in providing quality education for all children, regardless of gender and caste. It is in this context that all sections of society need to come together to enrich the fabric of school education. Communities, teachers, voluntary organisations and government officials together can help realise the objectives of DPEP in ways that will ultimately benefit all children.

NOTES

1. We thank the staff and students of the schools concerned for their welcome and cooperation; we are grateful to the members of the public who cooperated with us. We also express our appreciation and gratitude to all the district and state-level officials for their guidance and help in completing this micro study. All names have been changed to protect confidentiality.
2. These numbers are from the monthly returns filed by the schools at the Block Resource Centre.
3. I am indebted to Vimala Ramachandran for this insight.
4. In formal Tamil 'ur' means a village or place. But in popular usage in villages 'ur' has come to signify the area of habitation of the non-dalit castes.
5. Matriculation schools are affiliated to a separate board under the Tamil Nadu government. They are unaided and their medium of instruction is English.
6. The phrase 'hidden curriculum' is defined by Michael Apple thus: 'The norms and values that are implicitly, but effectively, taught in schools and that are not usually talked about in teachers' statements of ends or goals' (p. 96).
7. I examined these students in an informal fashion: checked their written work, asked them to read random passages, asked them to write new words, to repeat what was taught in class and to do simple mental arithmetic sums. I did this with class IV and V students in Mallimedu too.

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