

OXFORD

A Report on
Elementary Education
in India

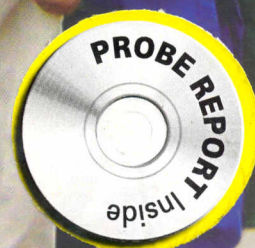
PROBE

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revisited



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PROBE revisited

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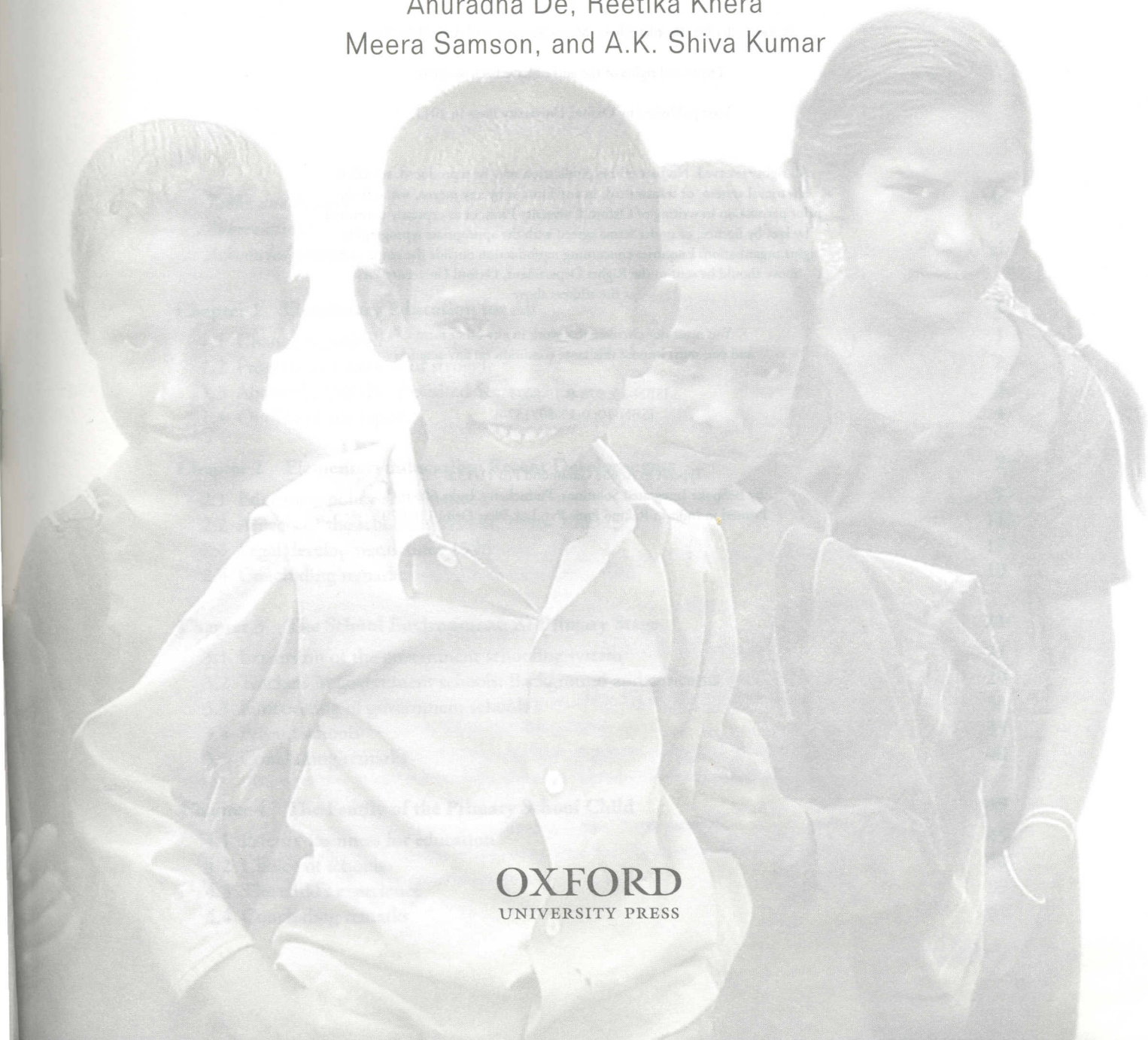
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PROBE revisited

A Report on Elementary Education in India

Contents

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Tables and Figures

Tables	
1.1 Details of PROBE Revisited Survey, 2006	4
2.1 School attendance in 2005–6 (per cent)	12
2.2 More schools are available	12
2.3 Increase in teacher recruitment (in '000)	13
2.4 Availability of teachers and classrooms in rural primary schools	14
2.5 Infrastructure in rural primary schools in 2006	14
2.6 Teachers and classrooms in rural primary schools in PROBE States, 2005–6	15
3.1 Midday meal fact sheet	25
3.2 Permanent and contract teachers	31
3.3 Pupil and teacher attendance in primary schools, 2006	35
3.4 Private school availability: 1996 and 2006	39
3.5 Heterogeneity of private schools at primary level	41
4.1 Changing aspirations for girls, 1996–2006	50
4.2 Government and private school enrolment, 2006 (6–12 age group)	50
4.3 Comparing annual costs of government and private schooling at primary level (in Rs)	55
4.4 Item-wise costs of primary schooling in 2006: Government and private (average annual costs in Rs at current prices)	56
4.5 Literacy and numeracy among children in government and private schools	57
4.6 Average time spent on work by those in school and those out of school, 2006 (6–12 age group)	60
4.7 Average time spent in work, 1996–2006 (6–12 age group)	60
4.8 Literacy status of parents of currently enrolled children in 6–12 age group	63
4.9 Anganwadis: Coverage and services	65

5.1	Variations in government schools with the upper primary stage	74
5.2	Literacy and numeracy competencies among children in government schools	78
5.3	Time-use of children enrolled in middle stage of schooling (hours/day)	83
5.4	Annual average costs of middle schooling, 2006 (government schools) (in rupees)	85
5.5	Variations in private schools with classes 6–8	85
5.6	Enrolment in government and private schools at middle stage across social groups (6–18 age group)	88
5.7	Annual average costs of middle schooling in private schools (in rupees)	88
6.1	Progress in Himachal Pradesh	94
6.2	Education levels in Himachal Pradesh vs India, 2005–6	95
6.3	Changes in student enrolment and teachers employed (Government schools in Himachal Pradesh)	98
6.4	Government schools with primary and middle level schooling in Himachal, 2006	98
6.5	Infrastructure in government primary schools in Himachal Pradesh, 2006	99
6.6	Costs of government schooling at primary stage (Rs/child/year)	100
6.7	Parents' aspirations for boys and girls, 2006 (enrolled children, 6–12 age group)	102
6.8	Parents' educational levels and occupations, 2006 (children in 6–12 age group in government schools)	103
6.9	Learning Achievements in Himachal Pradesh (government schools)	104
Figures		
1.1	Progress at a glance	2
2.1	Public expenditure on elementary education (all departments) (in constant prices)	11
2.2	Proportions (%) enrolled in school, 1992–3 and 2005–6 (6–14 age group)	12
2.3	Pupil–Teacher ratios in rural primary schools, 2005–6	15
3.1	Infrastructure changes between 1996 and 2006	22
3.2	Schools without any teaching activity when investigators arrived	37
3.3	Infrastructure in private schools, 2006	41
4.1	Decline in proportions out of school, 1996–2006 (6–12 age group)	46
4.2	Comparing proportions never-enrolled across social groups, 2006 (6–12 age group)	46
4.3	Changes in proportions currently-enrolled among boys and girls, 1996–2006 (6–12 age group)	47
4.4	Variations in numbers of children present in anganwadis	66
5.1	Changes in Proportions (%) Enrolled, 1996–2006 (11–14 age group)	70
5.2	Variations in proportions enrolled in middle stage across social groups (11–14 age group)	70
6.1	Per capita budgetary expenditure on education (Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and India) (in Rs in current prices)	94
6.2a	School participation in Himachal, 2006	96
6.2b	Comparing grades completed by the 15–18 age group, 2006 (Himachal Pradesh and PROBE States)	96
6.3	Item-wise costs of government schooling at middle stage in Himachal Pradesh, 2006 (in Rs per child per year)	100

Abbreviations

ABL	Activity-based Learning
ALM	Active Learning Methodology
ASER	Annual Survey of Education Report
BGVS	Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti
BRC	Block Resource Centre
BRTE	Block Resource Teacher Educator
CABE	Central Advisory Board of Education
CBO	Community Based Organization
CRC	Cluster Resource Centre
DIET	District Institute of Education and Training
DISE	District Information System for Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EdCIL	Education Consultants India Limited
ELP	Early Literacy Project
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
IDPAD	Indo-Dutch Programme for Alternatives in Development
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPC	Indian Penal Code
ISST	Institute of Social Studies Trust

X . ABBREVIATIONS

JBT	Junior Basic Training
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MVF	M. Venkatarangaiya Foundation
NCAER	National Council of Applied Economic Research
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NFE	Non-formal Education
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NIEPA	National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
NPE	National Policy on Education
NPEGEL	National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level
NSDP	Net State Domestic Product
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
NUEPA	National University of Educational Planning and Administration
OB	Operation Blackboard
OBCs	Other Backward Classes
PoA	Plan of Action
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
PTR	Pupil-Teacher Ratio
REI	Regional Institute of Education
RIVER	Rishi Valley Educational Resource Centre
SC	Scheduled Caste
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
SCR	Student-Classroom Ratio
SDMC	School Development Monitoring Committee
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
ST	Scheduled Tribe
SWRC	Social Work Research Centre
TLM	Teaching-Learning Materials
UEE	Universalization of Elementary Education
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
VEC	Village Education Committee
VEDC	Village Education Development Committee

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: ELEMENTARY EDUCATION FOR ALL

- 1.1 Change is possible
- 1.2 Progress in a context of struggle
- 1.3 About the PROBE Revisited Survey
- 1.4 Outline of Report

CHAPTER 2: ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

- 2.1 Education policy and finance
- 2.2 Aspects of the schooling system, 1996-2006
- 2.3 Legal developments since 1996

CHAPTER 3: THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AT PRIMARY STAGE

- 3.1 Expansion of the government schooling system
- 3.2 Teachers in government schools: background and concerns
- 3.3 Functioning of government schools
- 3.4 Private schools

CHAPTER 4: THE FAMILY OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD

- 4.1 Parents' keenness for education
- 4.2 Choice of schools
- 4.3 The child's experience

CHAPTER 5: UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOLING IN THE PROBE STATES

- 5.1 Enrolment
- 5.2 School provision: access and quality issues
- 5.3 More reasons why retention at middle stage is a problem
- 5.4 Issues around school choice

CHAPTER 6: THE ONGOING SCHOOL REVOLUTION IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

- 6.1 Background
- 6.2 Positive developments in Himachal, 1996-2006
- 6.3 Challenges facing government schools

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Low classroom activity
- 7.2 No quick fix
- 7.3 Himachal Pradesh is different
- 7.4 Concluding remarks

Chapter 1

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION FOR ALL

How would you feel if half of the buses and trains that are supposed to be running on a particular day were cancelled at random - every day of the year? And how long do you think such a disruption could continue until it creates an uproar in the Parliament and the national media? At most a day or two, surely. Yet, a similar disruption in the daily lives of children has been quietly happening for years on end. In rural north India, about half of the time, there is no teaching going on in the primary schools.

This was one of the key findings of the “PROBE Survey”, conducted in 1996 in the Hindi-speaking states of north India.¹ Sadly, the “PROBE Revisited Survey” presented in this report, conducted ten years later (in 2006) in the same states, found that nothing has changed in this respect. When the investigators arrived, half of the government schools were still exempt of any teaching activity.

This dismal state of affairs threatens to ruin the lives and future of Indian children, who come to school with eager hopes to learn. In a functioning democracy, this would be a major national concern. Yet, little notice has been taken of it in the corridors of power. The rhetoric of elementary education as a “fundamental right” goes along with a stubborn failure to make the schooling system work.

1.1 *Change is possible*

The schooling situation, however, is not immutable. In fact, many positive changes have taken place between 1996 and 2006. There is clear evidence of this from the two surveys.

To start with, *school participation* has improved dramatically. In 1996, 20 per cent of children in the 6-12 year age group were out of school. In 2006, we found hardly 5 per cent of children not enrolled in school. For the first time, the goal of universal school participation is within reach.

Along with this, *stark social disparities* in school enrolment have virtually disappeared at the primary level, whether it is the gap between boys and girls, or that between children of different communities. Enrolment rates among Scheduled Caste children (94%) and Muslim children (95%) are as high as the sample average for all children (95%). Enrolment among Scheduled Tribe children, however, is somewhat lower at 89 per cent.

This surge in school participation reflects a range of positive initiatives during the last 10 years or so. For instance:

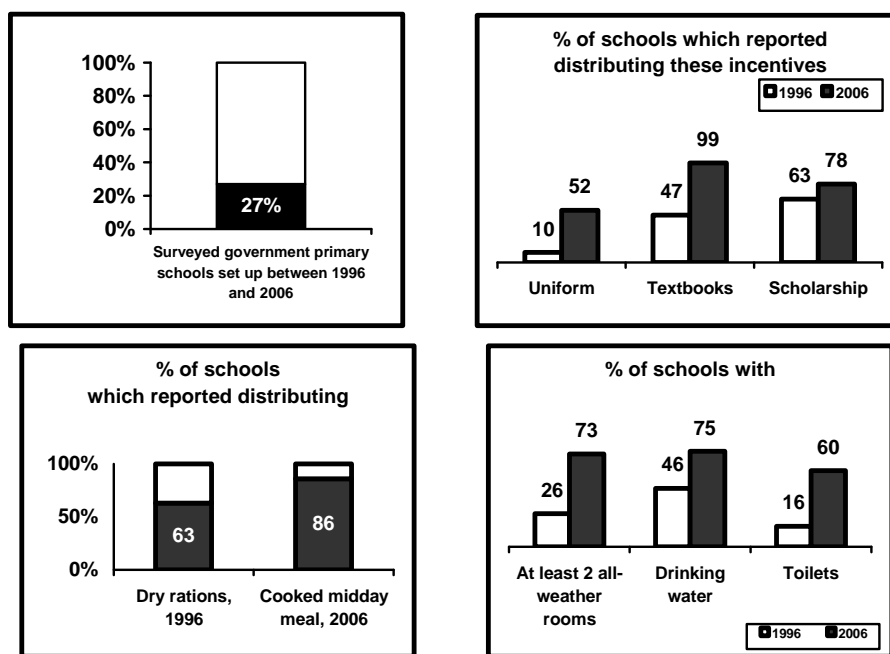
¹ The 1996 Survey (and the 2006 Survey) covered the low-literacy states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Three of these four states were bifurcated in the intervening period: Uttarakhand was carved out of Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand out of Bihar, and Chhattisgarh out of Madhya Pradesh. This group of states (seven altogether at the time of the Resurvey in 2006) is collectively referred to, throughout the report, as the PROBE States. Himachal Pradesh was also surveyed – to provide a contrast.

Schooling infrastructure has expanded rapidly. There has been an impressive increase in the number of primary schools between 1996 and 2006. One out of every four government schools surveyed in 2006 had been set up in the decade between the 1996 and 2006 Surveys. And schools in 2006 had more and better facilities. For instance, the proportion of schools with at least two all-weather² rooms went up from 26 per cent in 1996 to 73 per cent in 2006. Over three-fourths of all schools now have drinking water facilities. Toilets have been constructed in 60 per cent of all schools.

School incentives are also reaching many more. This has reduced the costs of schooling and contributed to higher school participation. To illustrate, textbooks and uniforms are being widely provided, free of cost. In 1996, free uniforms were distributed in only 10 per cent of primary schools. By 2006, they were provided in more than half the schools. Similarly, in 1996, less than half the schools reported distribution of free textbooks. Today, we find that almost all schools – 99 per cent – do so.

School meals are also in place in most schools and they are a big hit. In 1996, the dry ration scheme was operational in 63 per cent of the primary schools. By 2006, the dry ration scheme had been replaced by hot cooked meals. These were being served regularly in 84 per cent of the schools we visited. Children enjoy the meals, and this has definitely contributed to the surge in enrolment. Midday meals were however least regular in Bihar,³ where leakages and related problems had brought the programme to a halt in half of the schools surveyed.

Fig. 1.1 Progress at a glance



Source: School surveys: PROBE, 1996; PROBE Revisited, 2006.

²All-weather rooms are defined as *pakka* rooms with non-leaking roofs.

³Unless stated otherwise, this Report uses the undivided states as the unit of study – this means that the results for Jharkhand and Bihar are clubbed together and reported for “Bihar” in the sense of undivided Bihar. This is to facilitate comparison between the 1996 Survey and the 2006 Survey.

No doubt, some of these achievements have been facilitated by overall economic growth, improvements in parental literacy, and the rapid expansion of infrastructure and connectivity. But they also reflect a range of public initiatives, such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Supreme Court orders on midday meals, and stronger campaigns for the right to education. Many committed officials, parents, teachers and communities have also contributed to the new vibrancy of elementary schooling in India. It is this new momentum that gives hope to the possibility of injecting new life in the classroom as well.

1.2 *Progress in a context of struggle*

As we mentioned earlier much has changed in the schooling scenario since 1996. Though this study is not representative of India, we believe that many of our observations are valid for the country. It is heartening to see, especially in the PROBE States, the improvements in infrastructure and facilities in schools and to hear that incentive schemes are in operation. At the same time, even in these areas much remains to be done. There are still schools with poor infrastructure and facilities, and others where the incentive schemes are not even reported to be functioning. Education management needs to ensure that these gaps are plugged. And at the same time, put systems in place to reduce the leakages which occur at all levels.

More dismal of course is the lack of teaching input for many children. This can be attributed to a range of factors – the need for more teachers to be appointed, the need for teachers to be willing to work in more remote schools and in those with poor connectivity, the need for teachers to be present in school for the duration of the school-day, and for those who are present in school to be teaching. We discuss these issues of shortage of teachers, and inadequate contribution of teachers who are appointed, in greater detail in chapter 3 and in the concluding chapter.

Parents and children are acutely discouraged by what is happening. They are well aware that the teaching input is minimal. In addition, some parents and children (especially from disadvantaged castes, tribal groups and minorities), feel marginalised by the behaviour of teachers, the majority of whom are from more privileged social groups. Lack of education for a substantial proportion of parents makes it difficult for them to help their children with school-work. Insecure livelihoods, especially for those surviving on casual labour opportunities, make it even more difficult for them to sustain the struggle for schooling when they see that their children are learning little, and there is little hope of future benefits from schooling.

Efforts to improve school functioning are faced with a number of hurdles. We have already mentioned the low levels of teaching activity. Why are teachers not more accountable? It appears that being highly unionised and politicised, they enjoy considerable protection. Their recruitment does not seem to be based on their interest in teaching. There is also little support for them from the education department, to mentor them in doing what is a very difficult job -- successfully teach children from families whose parents have had little or no schooling themselves. The lives of many rural families, which revolve around farming and grazing animals, have little connection with schooling as it exists today. Some of these families are not even assured of their basic survival needs and are dependent on unskilled labour opportunities which come their way. Schooling is valued but children attend school only irregularly. The low levels of learning are thus related to weaknesses on both the supply side and the demand side. This makes it easy to indulge in a blame game, without feeling the need to work at changing the situation. Teachers in particular may feel that the task of actually ensuring that children learn is beyond them.

1.3 *About the PROBE Revisited Survey*

Before moving on, a few words are due about the PROBE Revisited Survey behind this report. As mentioned earlier, the 2006 Survey attempts to roughly replicate the PROBE Survey by following the same research

design, and using the same research tools in roughly the same villages that were visited in 1996. While the overall research design remained the same, there were some differences between the two surveys.

The research tools used in both the 1996 Survey and the 2006 Survey were more or less the same⁴, but questions which had not yielded much in 1996 were removed from the questionnaires in 2006. This had implications for the number of villages that the team was able to cover. The 2006 Survey covered a larger number of villages as we discuss below.

The PROBE Report was based on a survey of randomly-selected villages in the PROBE States and in Himachal Pradesh. In these “sample villages”,⁵ all educational facilities for primary education⁶ were surveyed. In each “sample village”, 12 households were randomly selected, among those that had at least one child in the age group of 6-12 years. In addition to this, in the PROBE States, educational facilities were surveyed in one “neighbouring village” within the specified population range.⁷ Including neighbouring villages in the survey enabled a larger number of schools to be included in the survey, without seriously disturbing the randomness of selection, and at the same time limiting the time and money involved in travelling between villages.

The 2006 Survey revisited the same “sample villages” that were studied in 1996, in which both schools and households were surveyed. In addition, “neighbouring villages” were also surveyed, as in the 1996 Survey, but these neighbouring villages were not necessarily the same as those covered in the 1996 Survey.⁸ The 2006 Survey also covered more neighbouring villages than the 1996 Survey, as the teams were able to cover a neighbouring village in all cases, which was not the case in 1996. Thus, in total, the 2006 Survey covered 276 villages while the 1996 Survey covered 236 villages. The number of households was similar (1,586 households in 2006 and 1,375 in 1996), as the number of sample villages -- in which the household survey was conducted -- was roughly the same.

The sample households are not the same in the 1996 and 2006 Surveys. Since the main purpose of the 2006 Survey was to look at how primary schooling has changed over time, rather than at what happened to the sample children, the same households were not included in the 2006 Survey. The reference population for the 1996 survey was randomly selected households with at least one child in the 6-12 age group. This was the same for the 2006 Survey.

It was decided to extend the focus of the 2006 Survey to also look at the upper primary stage of schooling. Teams had to include all educational facilities with grades 6-8 that were available in the sample and neighbouring villages. In the sample villages, during the survey conducted among households with a child in the 6-12 age group, feedback on upper primary schooling was obtained through separate schedules for those in the 6-18 age group who were currently enrolled in classes 6-8, and with those, in the same age group, who had dropped out from the middle stage of schooling. Details of the sample in the 2006 Survey are presented in Table 1.2.

⁴There were detailed questionnaires for the head-teacher and a randomly selected Class 1 teacher in the government schools in the village. Private schools were also covered in the school survey with a separate and shorter questionnaire. Feedback from parents and children was obtained through a survey of randomly-selected households in the village which had at least one child in the 6-12 age group. The household questionnaire included separate schedules for currently-enrolled children, drop-out children and never-enrolled children.

⁵The villages covered by the 1996 and 2006 Surveys are essentially an extended sub-sample of a random sample of villages studied in 1994 by the National Council of Applied Economic Research. For each of the PROBE States, villages were selected from the NCAER sample through stratified random sampling. The districts were grouped by level of female literacy, and sample districts were chosen at random from each group. Within the selected districts, villages were chosen at random among all NCAER villages in the 300 to 3,000 population range. These formed the “sample villages”. For further details, see PROBE Team (1999).

⁶Pre-primary educational facilities were included in this.

⁷In the case of Himachal Pradesh, two neighbouring villages were selected, since it was a single state being studied on its own.

⁸In the 2006 Survey, if a sample village did not have a school with classes 6-8, teams were asked to select a neighbouring village which had a school with upper primary grades.

Table 1.2 Details of PROBE Revisited Survey, 2006

	PROBE States		Himachal Pradesh	
Number of villages surveyed	237		39	
Number of households surveyed	1418		168	
Number of children aged 6-14 in the sample households	Female	Male	Female	Male
	enrolled in a school	1312	1673	155
not enrolled	140	93	6	1
Total	1452	1766	161	141
Number of sample schools	Government	Private	Government	Private
primary	225	30	44	6
middle with primary section	60	49	0	0
Total (with primary stage)	285	79	44	6
middle with primary section	60	49	0	0
middle without primary section	40	2	11	0
middle with secondary	15	16*	7	4*
Total (with middle stage)	115	67	18	4
Total	340	97	62	10
Number of teachers in government schools	Female	Male	Female	Male
teaching only primary stage	288	469	78	47
teaching only middle stage	55	259	35	84
teaching both stages	45	176	0	0
Total	388	904	131	131

*Note. *Most of these schools are integrated schools from primary to class 10 or class 12.*

The 2006 Survey also included in-depth qualitative studies in six of the sample villages. The main objectives of these qualitative studies were (1) to capture issues around school choice, (2) to observe school functioning, (3) to explore the possible role of caste dynamics in the schooling system, and (4) to gain insights into the functioning of the education committees. The selection of the six villages was based on these parameters: the selected villages should have a functional government school, it should have more than one school, and a mixed caste composition (including advantaged and disadvantaged groups). The research methodology for the qualitative studies included observation, discussions with individual key informants and with informal groups. They built on the data already gathered during the 2006 Survey, and explored issues in greater depth by a team of five researchers spending a week in each of the villages.

1.4 *Outline of Report*

As in the PROBE Report, we have attempted to present an authentic picture of the elementary schooling system as parents, teachers and children experience it. In that sense, this is a 'People's Report'. It is written

from the perspective of the underdog – especially the millions of children and parents who despite yearning for good quality education find themselves excluded from learning and acquiring decent education. This Report is based on the premise that it is the State’s responsibility and obligation to provide every child, no matter where she is born or to whom, good quality basic education. This is a fundamental right of every child, not simply a matter of welfare or development.

In this Report, we discuss the findings from 2006 with frequent references to the situation as we found it in 1996. This should help the reader get a sense of the types of change (good, bad or indifferent), or lack of it, that define the schooling experience for India’s children over the decade between 1996 and 2006.

We begin the Report with some analysis of recent changes in education policy. Education has received greater attention from the central government, culminating in the passing of the Right to Education Act by the national parliament in 2009. A supportive policy landscape is a welcome change, but as the findings of this Report demonstrate, elementary education for all is a difficult vision to implement and make meaningful. In Chapter 3, we report our findings on the school environment for primary school children. The situation is mixed with improvements in infrastructure, number of schools and incentive programs, but a failure to improve pupil teacher ratios, availability of trained⁹ teachers, teaching activity levels and other critical aspects of the schooling system. In Chapter 4, we look at the family of the primary school child and how the socio-economic context and family attitudes influence educational outcomes. In Chapter 5, we look at the situation of middle schooling, not taken up in the PROBE Survey of 1996. What is happening to the child after the primary stage of schooling? We found only low proportions of the 11-14 age group actually enrolled in middle school. A substantial proportion is still in primary school, and some may not even complete this stage. Children from more disadvantaged groups, particularly girls from these groups, mostly dropped out just after completing class 5 or during grades 6-8. Chapter 6 details the ongoing schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh, demonstrating that the government school system can deliver and that sustained systemic improvement is possible. In Chapter 7 we conclude with a discussion on critical areas still requiring attention if elementary education for all is to become a reality. We hope that the findings of this Report can contribute to ongoing evidence-based policy development at the national and state levels.

⁹Teachers with pre-service training.

Chapter 2

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The Indian education landscape has changed considerably in the decade between the PROBE Survey and the PROBE Revisited Survey. In 1996, at the time of the PROBE Survey, India's achievements in the field of education were abysmally low, disparities in educational attainments were very sharp, and state inertia in the field of education was crippling. In addition, and in some ways more troubling, was the fact that elementary education had not become a critical issue of development and social justice in India, in spite of a great demand for education among parents as well as children. Both the statistics about and attitudes towards education have changed – some for the better and others for the worse. Education has become a public issue of concern to voters and media attention has begun to focus more on what goes on in India's schools and how the system can be extended and improved. Articles on the performance of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the travails of the midday meal scheme, instances of irregularities in the functioning of government schools or the expanding private sector now appear on a regular basis. Along with other forms of democratic engagement, they have sparked public debate and built political pressure to improve the reach and quality of the schooling system. On the other hand, India is far from ensuring non-discriminatory access to quality education even though enrolment in primary schools is nearly universal. Inadequate attention is being paid to the education of children belonging to deprived, disadvantaged and discriminated groups in society. Differently-abled children in particular still remain neglected. Imparting quality education to these children as a priority does not appear to be of concern to India's elite or, for that matter, to the educational bureaucracy. There is a lack of political concern about the urgency to improve the quality of teaching and ensure better teacher accountability. This chapter looks at some major changes that have taken place in elementary education in recent years.

2.1 *Education policy and finance*

2.1.1 *Education policy, 1986-2006*

Looking back at the recent history of education policy in India, the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986 was an important landmark, with its new emphasis on elementary education. The NPE stressed the need for universal enrolment, universal retention and substantial improvements in the quality of education. As part of the implementation of the 1986 policy, the new scheme of 'Operation Blackboard' (OB) was launched, that of Non-Formal Education (NFE) was revised, and a number of schemes for teacher education were also taken up.

The late eighties and early nineties saw implementation of schemes aimed at extending the coverage and quality of the primary system in innovative ways. Initially there were a number of state-specific schemes.¹ These were followed by multi-state programmes. The Mahila Samakhya programme, specifically aimed at empowering women, was set up in four states in 1989. Its genesis was also the 1986 NPE. In 1993-94, the multi-state district-based District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was initiated, which built on the experience of the earlier state-specific schemes. The focus of the DPEP programme was to provide access to primary education to all children. In the first phase, the selected districts were either those with female literacy rates below the national average or those which had successfully implemented Total Literacy Campaigns.

Between 1996 and 2006, the role played by the central government was even more prominent. The second, third and fourth phases of DPEP were implemented. In the second phase, launched in 1997, coverage was expanded in all seven states, from 42 to 117 districts. In the third phase, a large number of districts within the educationally backward states were included. By 2000, over 219 districts (242 after bifurcation) in 15 states were covered. In the fourth phase, another 30 districts were covered.

Operation Blackboard, DPEP and SSA

Operation Blackboard (OB) came out of the 1986 National Policy for Education. It was set up in 1987-88 to improve facilities in primary schools with the aim of improving retention. The provisions under OB were:

- a building with at least two reasonably large all-weather rooms, and separate toilet facilities for boys and girls
- at least two teachers in every school, as far as possible one of them a woman
- essential teaching material (e.g., blackboards, maps, charts, toys).

In 1992, the scope of Operation Blackboard was enlarged to include three classrooms for the primary stage and three teachers; it was extended to the upper primary stage also.

District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was a major initiative aimed at universalizing primary education. It was begun in 1994 in 42 districts in 7 states and then expanded over later phases to 272 districts in 18 states. Its major aims included

- providing access to primary education for all children
- reducing primary drop-out rates to less than 10 per cent
- increasing learning achievement of primary school students by at least 25 per cent over measured baseline levels, and ensuring basic literacy and numeracy competencies
- reducing gender and social gaps in enrolment, dropout rates and learning achievements to less than 5 per cent.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched in 2001 to universalise elementary education by community ownership of the school system, in a mission mode. The objectives of SSA include:

- all children in school, Education Guarantee Centre, Alternate School, or 'Back-to-School' camp by 2003.
- all children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007
- all children complete eight years of elementary schooling by 2010
- bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010
- universal retention by 2010.

¹ The Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project in fact started as a pilot project as far back as 1983. The Bihar Education Project and the Uttar Pradesh Education Project were started in Bihar and 1991 in UP, respectively. In Rajasthan, the Shiksha Karmi Project and the Lok Jumbish Project were implemented in 1987 and 1992, respectively.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched in the year 2001-02. It retained most of the DPEP goals, extended coverage to all districts in the country, and shifted the DPEP target of universalising primary education to that of universalising elementary education. SSA was envisaged as bringing all existing schemes in the area of elementary education under one umbrella.

While the focus on elementary education was already a part of national policy in 1986, it benefited from significant global action on education following the Jomtien conference in 1990 and gained renewed impetus with the focus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. The MDG priorities² broadly matched those of the Indian government, except that in India the focus has shifted to eight years of schooling rather than five years. International prioritisation also helped the Indian government to receive financial aid to implement the new education initiatives.

Each of these programmes and plans focused primarily on children's access to schooling. Some attention was paid to the quality of the schooling experience but the main concern has been the enrolment of children who have been left out of the schooling system. One of the major achievements has been the development and updating of a comprehensive database on schools under the District Information System of Education (popularly known as DISE).

DISE Data

The District Information System for Education (DISE) dataset provides valuable insights into various aspects of school availability, quality, access and retention. Its analysis of time series and cross-sectional data has led to timely and remedial interventions by states/districts covered under DPEP. The annual reports cover detailed time series and cross-sectional analysis of institutions by type of management, enrolment, teachers, classrooms and repetition rates.

The district was selected as nodal point for collection, computerization, analysis and use of school level data under DPEP. It began with 42 districts and now under SSA it covers 624 districts (spread over 35 states and union territories). The system has also been extended to the state and national level.

The fundamental requirement behind the initiation of this project was to establish an information base for planning and monitoring of project information for DPEP. The earlier system of the states collecting educational statistics under the guidance of MHRD had lost credibility among data users due to delays, high aggregation and lack of accountability with regards to validation and reliability tests. It was recognized that in terms of scope, coverage, availability and use, school statistics needed major reforms. This task of building a sound data collection and reporting system to help not only the grassroots but also the educational administrators at the state and national level was taken up by National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) in 1995, with financial assistance from UNICEF.

² Goal 2 explicitly focuses on primary education with the aim to achieve 'universal primary education'. The target is to ensure that all children, boys and girls, are able to complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015. The focus on girls' education is also reiterated in Goal 2 where the target is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education.

Comment: The National Curriculum Framework*

Vinod Raina

...The build up and the processes that have gone into preparing the NCF 2005 would appear to be much more academically sound and wide-ranging compared to the ham-handed manner in preparing the previous version, the NCF 2000 by the NDA government. The NDA effort... had elicited widespread criticism. The criticism was, however, most severe regarding the attempt of the NCF 2000 to redefine the approach to curriculum design in a manner seen by many as at variance with the values enshrined in the Constitution. The subsequent attempt to rewrite history books was only one of the questionable actions that followed the NCF 2000.

NCF 2005 squarely locates itself within the rubric of constitutional values, namely democracy, debate, secularism, social justice, equity, scientific temper and so on. To that extent it seems to have corrected the distortions that had appeared via NCF 2000, thereby preparing the ground for the UPA government to claim that it has fulfilled the promise of 'detoxification' in a substantial manner...A number of eminent people from various professions, from all over the country, were involved in the process, lending a degree of credibility and respectability to the effort.

Anyone who has practised critical pedagogy stressing on understanding and problem solving, and an approach that stresses on construction of knowledge rather than its mere transmission as I have, or believes in it, cannot but endorse the NCF 2005...[However, in the context of looking at it objectively] the immediate question that arises is – What is the purpose of the document? One could ascribe two purposes to it – one to help initiate a national debate for a systemic change in the current school methodology and content, and the second to help institutions charged with the academic responsibility for school education – the SCERTs, DIETs and so on – to change their way of working and approach to the content and process of education. To me it is doubtful whether either of these purposes will be substantially served by the draft document. And that has essentially to do with the manner in which it has been written.

The NCF reads as an exhaustive compilation of assertions and opinions for a particular approach to education. Much as one might agree with these assertions, the document does not seek to engage in a debate with those who have differing views, since it mostly *asserts* rather than *argues*. One is not talking of ideological differences here, but pedagogical debates such as the question of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction and the place of English in the primary stage; whether to have examinations or not; softening the borders of tightly defined subject areas at the elementary stage; legitimising local knowledge in order to connect the school to the life of the child, hence decentralising the teaching-learning process; linking education to the knowledge base and political economy of labour, in particular that of the informal sector; using conflict situations in the child's experience as a pedagogy of learning; celebrating and negotiating plurality and so on...Accepting the NCF unquestioningly ... because it comes from the premier school education institution, the NCERT... actually flies in the face of what the document is asserting – that education and understanding should not be based on the authority of the teacher, book or the expert, but must be transacted in a manner that takes into account the recipient's questions, experiences and understandings.

...[Can the assertions be] transformed to arguments supported by evidence and research in its main body that are comprehensible to the ordinary masses, parents, teachers and educationists within SCERTs and DIETs. That is important if different books, methodologies, processes and examinations are to be put into place for every child in India, rather than for a few that are directly covered by the NCERT and CBSE. Otherwise... the only purpose it may end up serving is to become a question for BEd and MEd students who will be asked to write a 'short note' or the 'salient features' of the NCF 2005! And that will be the ultimate insult to what it preaches.

*Excerpted from *Seminar*, 2005, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2005/552/552%20comment.htm>

National Curriculum Framework

The idea of a national curriculum framework came from the effort to decide on a national system of education, visualised by the NPE 1986 and the PoA 1992 as a system which would have “a common core³ along with other components that are flexible”.⁴ The period between the PROBE Survey and the PROBE Revisited Survey were marked by the production of the National Curriculum Framework in 2000 and the National Curriculum Framework in 2005. Educationists and social activists were alarmed by the NCF 2000, to the extent that in 2002 they even appealed to the National Human Rights Commission⁵ and the Supreme Court⁶ to intervene and arrest the implementation of the NCF 2000 and textbooks based on it. NCF 2005 has been commended for being refreshingly different from the NCF 2000, but at the same time criticised for its lack of reasoned arguments for the positions taken on a wide range of issues which makes it unlikely to be useful to people on the ground (see Box – Comment: The National Curriculum Framework).

Of critical importance for teachers, parents and children covered in the 1996 and 2006 Surveys is the fact that the NCF 2005 largely ignores inequalities within the schooling system.⁷ The focus is on children who are burdened by the curriculum, and not the majority who suffer because of limited access to good infrastructure, adequate teaching, and appropriate textbooks.

2.1.2 *Education finance in India*

Implementation of these flagship programmes in education – DPEP followed by SSA – gives the impression of large increases in resources invested in education. But the first thing to note is that there has been no noticeable increase in expenditure on elementary education as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Since 1996, 2 per cent or less of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been set aside for elementary education. This proportion falls much short of the 3 per cent of GDP recommended for elementary education, in 1966 by the Kothari committee, in 1996 by the Saikia committee, and in 2006 by the CAFE committee.⁸

In absolute terms the total budgeted expenditure in elementary education has increased nearly threefold from around Rs 18 thousand crores in 1995-96 to around Rs 57 thousand crore rupees in 2005-06. Expenditure in constant prices also show a large increase – the amount has almost doubled. But this growth has not been uniform – the late nineties show a high rate of growth, followed by a relative stagnation between 2000-01 and 2003-04, followed by a sudden increase from 2003-04 to 2005-06 (Fig. 2.1). The increase in the late nineties coincides with a large increase in teachers’ salaries that followed the Fifth Pay Commission’s recommendations for pay revision and so reflects this rather than an increase in teaching inputs.

³ Included in the elements in the common core, was a commitment that all education would be in strict conformity with secular values. See Arjun Dev (2005).

⁴ See Dev (2005), NCERT (2005).

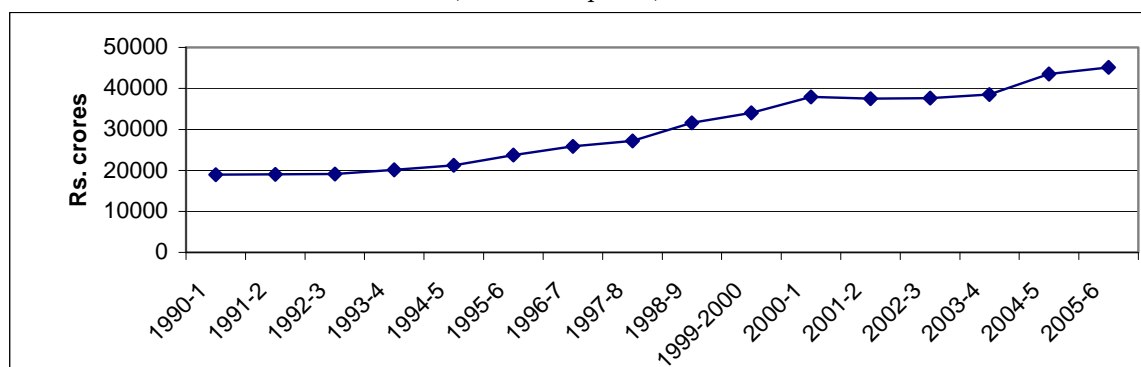
⁵ Four educationists, Janaki Rajan, Sanaya Nariman, Kumkum Roy and Ashwini Cariappa, filed a complaint on 8 January 2002 with the NHRC against the changes in textbooks proposed by MHRD and NCERT, alleging in particular that the history books were non-secular (*The Times of India*, 23 January 2002, www.isidelhi.org.in/hrnews/HR_THEMATIC.../Education-2002.pdf).

⁶ A Public Interest Litigation was filed by Aruna Roy, BG Varghese and Meena Radhakrishna against the NCF 2000, and on its basis the Supreme Court passed a Stay Order on the NCF (*The Hindu*, 2 March 2002, *ibid*).

⁷ Sadgopal (2005), Setalvad (2005).

⁸ These committees have all recommended that 6 per cent of GDP should be spent on education, and half of this i.e. 3 per cent on elementary education.

Fig. 2.1 Public Expenditure on Elementary Education (all Departments)
(in constant prices)



The second major change in the past decade has been the increased role of the central government. Between 2000-01 and 2005-06, the Centre's share in the total expenditure on education has increased from just over one-tenth (12%) to about a quarter (25%). The central government accounts for the bulk of Plan expenditure and many of the recent changes in the education sector have largely been financed by the central government. Although there is a resource crunch in education on both the Centre and the States, the Centre is in a relatively better position as it is able to access alternative sources of revenue through external aid and the education cess. The increase in expenditure from 2003-04 (see Fig. 2.1) coincides with the implementation of the education cess.

Education Cess

The central government recently tried a different source of finance for meeting the huge resource requirement for universalisation of elementary education (UEE). An education cess of 2 per cent was levied on all central taxes in 2004, which yielded around Rs 5000 crores in 2004-05 and more in the later years. A dedicated non-lapsable fund titled as 'Prathmik Shiksha Kosh' is maintained by the Department of Elementary Education and Literacy (MHRD) to receive the proceeds of this cess. The receipts are utilized solely and exclusively for elementary education, including Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (Midday Meal Scheme). This fund is treated as an additional supplementary resource for financing elementary education.

The state governments, who are still responsible for 75 per cent of the expenditure, mostly cover non-Plan expenditure. The growth in state expenditure has been much more restricted. Partly this arises because the states have limited sources of revenue generation under the existing resource-sharing system, while the resource demands of different sectors are quite high. Following the adoption of the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programme the problems have been aggravated as with the implementation of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act there was increased pressure on the states to limit expenditure. This would necessarily have an adverse impact on the quality of the existing schools -- when enrolments are increasing, resources are needed to expand education infrastructure.

Third, the large inter-state variations remain and have even increased in the recent years. For instance, Himachal Pradesh spent Rs 2005 per capita on education in 2005-06 compared with just Rs 514 in Bihar. Naturally, this has a direct bearing on the access and quality of education in the different states. It is inevitable that the poorer states will have a lower per capita expenditure, but it is also clear that the various Centre-State transfer mechanisms have not been able to balance out the differences.

2.2 Aspects of the schooling system, 1996-2006

All the activity of the decade between the PROBE Survey and the PROBE Revisited Survey, outlined in the preceding section, has delivered some significant changes in the experience and outcomes of elementary education across the country. This section highlights some of these changes based on secondary data, as a prelude to the presentation of more detailed field survey data in subsequent chapters. As will be seen further, many of the changes that are evident from secondary data also emerge from our field survey (some of them have already been discussed in Chapter 1).

2.2.1 School participation: higher and more equal

We have noted in Chapter 1 that a remarkable surge in school participation occurred between 1996 and 2006, and this is reflected in other sources of secondary data such as NSSO and NFHS. Comparing school participation rates between NFHS 1 and NFHS 3, we find there has been a large increase in participation levels in the 6-14 age group, particularly in rural areas. Among boys, the proportions in school increased from 72 per cent to 82 per cent, while girls registered an even sharper increase – a jump from 52 per cent to 73 per cent. However the data also indicates that school participation in 2005-06 was not yet universal.

Table 2.2a Proportions (%) enrolled in school, 1992-93 and 2005-06
(6-14 age group)



Source: The 1992-93 figures are from the NFHS-1 report (Table 3.10, p. 56). The 2005-06 figures are from NFHS-3 report (Table 2.9, p. 33).

Table 2.2b presents figures on school attendance for the PROBE States (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, all “undivided”) in 2005-06, and also separately for Himachal Pradesh. The figures reflect the considerable narrowing of social disparities in this respect. However, some significant disparities persist in the PROBE States (particularly in Bihar). In Himachal Pradesh, they have virtually disappeared, at least in terms of whether children are reported by families to be attending school.

Table 2.2b School attendance in 2005-06

	(per cent)		
Proportion of children aged 6-12 years who are attending school:	Himachal Pradesh	All India	PROBE States
All children	97	82	76

Urban	97	87	81
Rural	97	80	75
Rural girls	96	77	70
Rural Scheduled Tribe girls	94	66	63
Rural Muslim girls*	100	67	52

Note: The number of rural Muslim girls in Himachal Pradesh is very small.

Source: NFHS-3 report.

These trends are also reflected in related statistics such as the proportion of children who have never attended school. In the 6-14 age group, the proportion of never-enrolled children had come down to 5.7 per cent at the all-India level in 2005-06 (with a much lower figure, if age 6 is excluded). This proportion is slightly higher for the PROBE States (7.8%), with undivided Bihar being the worst performer -- 12 per cent of children there had never attended school. In Himachal Pradesh, by contrast, it is extremely rare now for a child not to be enrolled at all: less than one per cent of children in the 6-14 age group (and only 0.3 per cent in the 7-14 age group) had never attended school in 2005-06.

2.2.2. Expansion of the schooling system

As mentioned earlier, the reference period also saw the launch of major national programmes in elementary education – DPEP in four phases and finally the umbrella programme of SSA. These programmes were focused particularly on bringing all children into school. They have led to significant improvements in the accessibility and infrastructure of government schools, particularly in rural areas.

Table 2.2 More schools are available

	Number of schools	
	Primary schools	Middle schools
1995-96	590421	171216
2005-06	772568	288493
Percentage increase	31	68

Source: Selected Education Statistics, Ministry of Human Development, Government of India, relevant years.

As Table 2.2 shows, for instance, the number of primary schools (where the highest class is 5 or less) rose from 0.59 million to 0.77 million between 1995-96 and 2005-06 – an increase of more than 30 per cent. For middle schools (with highest class 7 or 8), the increase was as large as 68 per cent, partly due to the shift in policy focus from five years to eight years of schooling for all. In these years, not only were new primary and middle schools set up, many of the older primary schools were also upgraded to class 8. There were 0.29 million middle schools in 2005-06. The improved access to middle schooling is reflected in the decline in the ratio of primary to upper primary schools from 3.5 in 1995-96 to 2.8 in 2005-06.

More teachers have also been recruited in this period – here again, the growth rate was higher for middle schools. To illustrate, Table 2.3 compares the number of teachers (male and female) in primary and upper primary schools in 1995-96 and 2005-06. In primary schools there was a sharp increase (more than 50 per cent) in recruitment of female teachers, and the male-female gap declined. The situation is a bit different in upper primary schools – the absolute increase was higher for male than female teachers (236 compared to 173), but the situation is reversed when one looks at the proportionate increase (female teacher appointments increased by 41 per cent compared to that of males which increased by 31 per cent). For male and female teachers combined, appointments increased by 25 per cent at the primary level and 34 per cent at the upper-primary level during this period.

Table 2.3 Increase in teacher recruitment

(in '000)

	Primary schools teachers			Middle schools teachers		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1995-96	1176	558	1734	758	424	1182
2005-06	1319	842	2161	992	597	1589
Absolute increase	143	284	427	236	173	407
Percentage increase	12	51	25	31	41	34

Source: Selected Education Statistics, Ministry of Human Development, Government of India, relevant years.

These and related changes have led to a significant improvement in the reach of the schooling system, and this has undoubtedly contributed to the surge in school participation discussed earlier. However, enormous gaps in school infrastructure remain, even in terms of the most basic indicators, as the next section illustrates.

2.2.3 The continuing quality gap

In spite of a significant expansion of schooling facilities, an enormous “quality gap” remains in India’s schooling system. The surge in school participation in recent years will have contributed to this shortfall in quality. Some aspects of this quality gap, such as the low levels of classroom activity, have already been introduced in Chapter 1. But it is important to note that more basic deficiencies also continue to cripple the system, in spite of recent progress.

The point is illustrated in Tables 2.4 and 2.5 which presents selected indicators of school infrastructure and facilities for rural primary schools in 2006-07 (DISE) – the most recent year for which relevant data are available. The tables report the figures for the best and worst performing states, the all-India average, and a weighted average for the PROBE States. Table 2.4 clearly shows that though at the national level the number of schools and teachers have increased substantially, the changes have not been uniform. Table 2.5 makes a similar point of infrastructural facilities available in primary schools.

Table 2.4 Availability of teachers* and classrooms in rural primary schools

	Best state**	Worst state**	PROBE States	India
Average no. of teachers per school	6.3 (Kerala)	2.0 (Rajasthan)	3	2.8
Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR)	16 (J & K)	64 (Bihar)	42	34
Proportion(%) of single-teacher schools	0.5 (Kerala)	44 (Rajasthan)	19	17
Proportion(%) of pupils in single-teacher schools	0.1 (Kerala)	32 (Rajasthan)	10	8
Proportion(%) of primary schools with at least two classrooms	100 (Tamil Nadu)	29 (Assam)	85	78
Student-Classroom Ratio (SCR)	15 (Himachal; J&K)	92 (Bihar)	54	40
Proportion (%) of schools with SCR above 60	0.6 (Himachal)	67 (Bihar)	26	18

Notes: *Includes para-teachers. **Among “major states”.

Source: Rural Analytical Tables, 2006-07, National University of Education Planning and Administration, New Delhi.

The first point to note is the difference in the performance of the worst and the best performing states. The difference between the two is startling in most cases, and shows how far the states lagging behind have to go to build anything like an adequate schooling system. More than one-third of the primary schools in Jharkhand do not have a school building compared with Tamil Nadu where there are no such schools. Another state that performs very poorly is Rajasthan: nearly half (44%) of all schools were single-teacher schools and nearly one-third of all students were enrolled in such single-teacher schools.

Table 2.5 Infrastructure in rural primary schools in 2006

	Best state ^a	Worst state ^a	PROBE States	India
Proportion (%) of schools without building	0 (Tamil Nadu)	36 (Jharkhand)	5	4
Proportion (%) of schools with the following facilities:				
Pre-primary	81 (J&K)	4 (Orissa)	26	27
Boundary wall	89 (Punjab)	16 (Jharkhand)	39	40
Drinking water	100 (Tamil Nadu)	59 (Assam)	87	82
Girls' toilet	77 (Punjab)	6 (J&K)	36	32
Electricity	76 (Kerala)	1 (Bihar)	7	18
Ramp	84 (Maharashtra)	3 (Jharkhand)	23	27
Playground	79 (Haryana)	18 (Jharkhand)	46	45
Book-bank	89 (Haryana)	12 (Orissa)	42	43
Computer	40 (Kerala)	2 (Assam)	5	5
Kitchen shed	72 (Tamil Nadu)	2 (J&K)	30	32
Summary index of facilities	59 (Kerala)	21 (Jharkhand)	34	35

Source: Rural Analytical Tables, 2006-7, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi.

Second, note that for the indicators listed in Table 2.4 and 2.5, the worst performing include Bihar, Jharkand and Rajasthan among the PROBE States. Bihar has the highest pupil teacher ratio and the highest student classroom ratio. Rajasthan, as already mentioned has the highest number of single-teacher schools. Jharkhand scores most poorly on physical infrastructure and facilities.

On many parameters, the situation in the PROBE States is worse than for India as a whole. This is in spite of the fact that the PROBE States have seen a lot of activity since the nineties, as they were the focus of a number of school improvement programmes. There have been improvements but shortages continue to persist. Classrooms in the PROBE States cram 54 students in each room, compared with 40 at the all India level. Over one-fourth (26%) of all children in the PROBE States are enrolled in schools where there are more than 60 students per classroom, compared to a lower proportion for India as a whole (18%). Only 7 per cent of schools in the PROBE States have electricity compared to 18 per cent for India as a whole. On other parameters, the picture in the PROBE States is similar to the all-India picture. Single-teacher schools account for 19 per cent of primary schools and 10 per cent of pupils in the PROBE States, with the corresponding figures for all-India being relatively close at 17 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively. Figures for physical infrastructure and facilities in schools in the PROBE States were quite similar to India as a whole: high in the case of drinking water (87% and 82%, respectively), close to half in the case of playgrounds (46% and 45%, respectively), and lower in the case of boundary walls (37% and 38%, respectively). While the averages for PROBE States are quite low on many counts, one can expect that the corresponding figures for relatively deprived areas of the PROBE States would be much worse than these figures.

2.2.4 Variations within PROBE States

At the time of the PROBE Survey in 1996, the PROBE States were similar in terms of educational disadvantage and were the worst performers in the country. Ten years later, however, there was much variation among these states. This is because Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, already somewhat better positioned to start with, have witnessed faster improvement in their educational indicators than Uttar Pradesh and Bihar since 1996.⁹

Table 2.6 reports the same indicators as in Table 2.4 for each of the PROBE States. In terms of the most basic physical infrastructure, whether it is the availability of a school building or the student-classroom ratio, Bihar and Jharkhand are worst off. For instance, in Bihar on average, as many as 92 children are crammed in each classroom. Jharkhand is not much better, with 80 students per classroom. Rajasthan and Uttarakhand are at the other end of the scale with just 29 and 23, respectively.

Table 2.6 Teachers* and classrooms in rural primary schools in PROBE States, 2005-06

	Bihar	Jhar- khand	Uttar Pradesh	Uttara- khand	Madhya Pradesh	Chattis- garh	Rajas- than
Average no. of teachers per school	3	2	4	2	2	2	2
Proportion (%) of female teachers	27	25	37	52	25	27	25
Proportion (%) of primary schools with at least two classrooms	83	47	99	84	78	76	91
Student-Classroom Ratio (SCR)	92	80	54	23	43	35	29
Proportion (%) of children enrolled in schools with SCR \geq 60	79	31	53	17	32	21	10

Note: *Includes para-teachers.

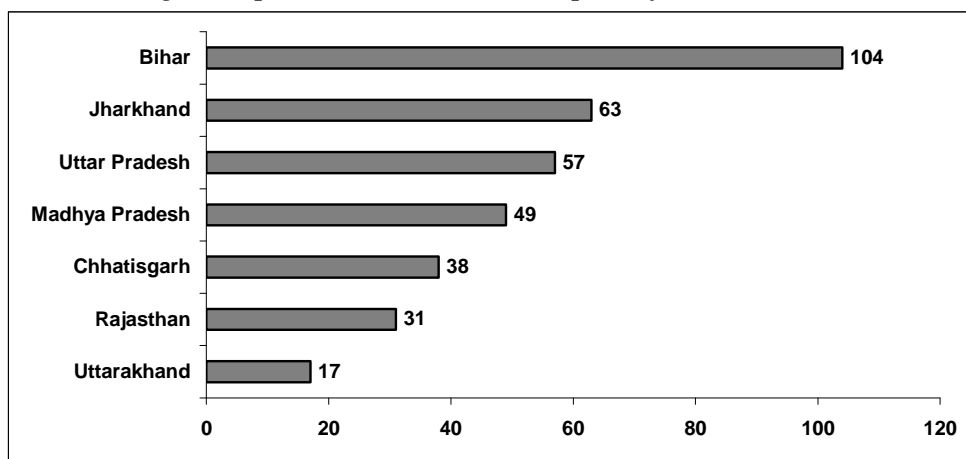
Source: Rural Analytical Tables, 2006-7, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi.

These variations are also striking when it comes to teacher-related indicators. Take, for instance, Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTR). The PTR is a useful summary indicator of teacher availability, with consequences for the quality and effectiveness of classroom interaction. In terms of international comparisons, India reported a pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) of 39 in primary schools in 2006-07 while it was only 18 for China in the same period.¹⁰ India's PTR is only slightly better than Sierra Leone and Benin and is worse than the PTR in Gambia, Senegal and Chad. There are enormous variations between the states in India. Fig. 2.7 gives PTR in rural primary schools for the PROBE States in 2006-07. They are in league with Burundi and Burkina Faso. Bihar's PTR is among the highest in the world, almost as bad as found in Rwanda. The PTR in the state of Himachal Pradesh, on the other hand, is comparable to what is found in UK, USA and China.

⁹Another change not discussed in much detail here but worth noting has been the emergence of a low achievements pocket in the east: including parts of West Bengal, Assam and almost all of Orissa. These areas have joined the ranks of the poorest-performing states while Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh seem to have moved out of that category.

¹⁰The figures for all-India and the individual PROBE States are from NUEPA, 2008 and for other countries from the UNESCO database.

Fig. 2.7 Pupil Teacher* Ratios in rural primary schools, 2006-07



*Note: *Includes para-teachers.*

Source: Rural Analytical Tables, 2006-7, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi.

There is a massive shortage of teachers in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, so much so that in many schools each teacher is in charge of more than 100 children.¹¹ The proportion of such schools is 16 and 13 per cent, respectively. In Rajasthan and Uttarakhand, there are hardly any schools that face such an acute shortage of teachers. However, nearly half of the primary schools in rural Rajasthan are single-teacher schools. There are very few such schools in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. However the point remains that teachers in the PROBE States are expected to cope with unmanageable numbers of pupils.

Another contrast is in the appointment of female teachers in all the PROBE States. With the exception of Uttarakhand, where half of the teachers are female, female teachers are still less than one-third of all teachers. Perhaps also worth noting is that all the PROBE States, with the exception of Uttarakhand, are yet to achieve the level of teacher provisioning that already had been achieved in Himachal Pradesh at the beginning of this period, ten years ago (i.e. in 1995-96).

On the whole, it seems that Uttarakhand is way ahead of the other PROBE States. This is possibly for reasons that are similar to those that account for its neighbouring hill state of Himachal Pradesh. Another “new” state that has made great progress is Chhattisgarh, overtaking its parent state of Madhya Pradesh on many indicators. The only “new” state where things seem to have become worse, or stagnated, is Jharkhand.

2.3 Legal developments since 1996

Since the PROBE Survey in 1996, there have been significant legal developments that affect children’s access to education and schooling. These developments include the Supreme Court’s intervention in the midday meals scheme and amendments to the law on child labour, and the abolition of corporal punishment. Most significantly, the Indian Parliament passed a law guaranteeing free and compulsory education to children aged 6 to 14 in August 2009. A law that squarely guarantees the right to elementary education has remained elusive for a long time. For a detailed discussion of these developments from a legal perspective, see Box -- Mid-day Meals, Child Labour and Corporal Punishment: Legal Developments, and Box – The “Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009”.

¹¹This reflects the high population density in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Mid-day Meals, Child Labour and Corporal Punishment: Legal Developments

Surabhi Chopra

Mid-day meals

Responding to public interest litigation on the right to food,* the Supreme Court directed state governments in November 2001 to introduce cooked mid-day meals in all government and government-assisted primary schools within six months. In doing this, the Court recognised connections between poverty, hunger and school attendance, and responded robustly to civil society efforts to ensure better nutrition for primary school children.

Child labour

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 bans the employment of children below the age of 14 years in 15 occupations and 65 processes that are hazardous to children's lives and health. Many advocates for children's rights argue that *all* types of work endanger a child's health and education, and push for a complete ban on child labour. So far, the Government of India has not agreed to a blanket ban, but has expanded the list of occupations considered hazardous for children. In 2006, the list was expanded to include, *inter alia*, work as a domestic servant, and work in food stalls, teashops, hotels, and in leisure and entertainment businesses. In 2008, it was expanded again to include, *inter alia*, diving, mechanised fishing, timber handling, food processing, beverage manufacturing, stone grinding, quarrying and slate stone mining.

Corporal punishment

Indian law pulls in conflicting directions on corporal punishment in schools. Legal provisions under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Juvenile Justice Act 2002 could, in theory, be used to prosecute someone who inflicts corporal punishment on a child in school. However, Sections 88 and 89 of the IPC provide legal defences to a person inflicting violence on a child if such violence is "disciplinary". Section 89 of the IPC is particularly problematic. It potentially protects from criminal liability a teacher or staff member who inflicts serious harm - "short of intentional or reckless murder, attempted murder, or grievous injury" - on a child under 12, if such violence was "in good faith for the benefit of the child"! Jurisprudence that is dated, but which has never been overruled, supports the view that parents impliedly consent to corporal punishment when they send their child to school. India is bound by the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child 1989, which enjoins States to ensure that "school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity". Arguably, the Indian government is in breach of this obligation.

Recent developments indicate a shift towards protecting children from violence in schools. A few States have abolished corporal punishment as a matter of law (for e.g., The Goa Children's Act 2003, Andhra Pradesh Education Rules 1966 and Tamil Nadu Education Rules). The National Policy on Education 1992, the National Charter for Children 2003, the National Plan of Action for Children 2005 all oppose corporal punishment. The National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights has issued a set of guidelines on abolishing corporal punishment in schools. The recently passed Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 prohibits physical punishment and mental harassment of children. However, it does not *criminalise* corporal punishment, and leaves intact the defences created by Section 88 and 89 of the IPC.

**PUCL vs Union of India and others* (Writ Petition [Civil] No. 196 of 2001)

The “Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009”

Surabhi Chopra

Journey towards the Act:

In 2002, the Constitution of India was amended to include Article 21A, which made free and compulsory education a fundamental right for children between the ages of 6 and 14.* Article 21A provides that the State “shall provide free and compulsory education [emphasis added]” to children within this age group. It thus moves universal primary education from an aspirational Directive Principle of State Policy to a Constitutional obligation that Central and State Governments are duty-bound to deliver. The Indian Parliament passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act on 4 August 2009, and it came into force on 1 April 2010.

Important provisions of the 2009 Act:

The Act defines elementary education as education from the first to the eighth standard.	Civil society groups have argued that Article 21A stops short, and that the amendment should have covered pre-primary education as well as education beyond the age of 14.
Children between the ages of 6-14 years have the right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school, and will not be liable to pay any fees which may hinder the pursuit or completion of elementary education (Section 3).	The term “neighbourhood” has not been defined, which is an important detail. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on MHRD’s recommendation that distance and/or commuting time be included as a criterion for determining what a neighbourhood is under the law has not been incorporated.
If a child is in a school where she cannot complete elementary education, she has the right to seek transfer to any other “government run or aided school” (Section 5).	This provision tries to counter bureaucratic hurdles to admission in a new place for a child who has to move to another part of the country, and seems to aim particularly at the disruptions faced by the children of migrant workers.
A child above six years of age who is not enrolled in school or was unable to complete her education shall be enrolled in an age-appropriate class, and shall be entitled to “special training” to reach the educational level of her peers. Furthermore, such children shall be entitled to free schooling until they complete elementary education, even after they reach 14 years of age (Section 4).	This provision seems aimed at incorporating the “bridge course” method to transition children who have dropped out of school back into education. However, it leaves no discretion to the school, the parents or the child about when it might be appropriate to enrol the child in a class below her age group.
The Act explicitly includes physically and mentally disabled children within its ambit as well as children from migrant families, requiring local authorities to ensure admission of migrant children into school.	Emphasising the state’s responsibility to these particular groups of children is welcome given the extreme difficulties they face in accessing education. That said, other vulnerable constituencies (e.g. homeless children and working children) should also have been mentioned specifically.
No child shall be held back in any class or expelled until the completion of elementary education (Section 16).	The ban on expulsion is welcome. However, a blanket prohibition on holding a child back is worrying because it potentially legitimises practices that widen the “achievement gap” between children who are disadvantaged and those who are relatively privileged. Automatic promotion could result in children reaching the 8th standard without acquiring certain basic skills. The Act does not grapple with, and potentially entrenches, this problem. It does not require measurement and monitoring of learning outcomes, or require schools to give remedial help to students performing below the norm. As the Parliamentary Standing Committee noted, mandatory promotion until the 8th standard seems to avoid questions of accountability entirely, denies discretion to teachers, parents, children and schools, and could prove costly in the long-run.
The Act provides that no child shall be subject to physical	This prohibition is a positive step, but would have been

punishment or mental harassment, and those who contravene this provision can be disciplined (Section 17).	stronger if it required service rules in all types of schools to explicitly prohibit punish corporal punishment.
Duties imposed on the State	
The appropriate government is required to ensure that schools exist within prescribed neighbourhood limits; where schools do not exist, they must be established within 3 years of the legislation coming into force (Section 6).	
The duty to provide free and compulsory elementary education to every child encompasses the duty to ensure admission, attendance and completion of elementary education (Section 8).	The Act's explicit emphasis on <i>completion</i> of elementary education is to be welcomed.
Duties imposed on schools and teachers	
Private schools are required to reserve at least 25 per cent of available slots for children "belonging to a disadvantaged group" or "children belonging to weaker sections" in the neighbourhood and provide free and compulsory education until they complete elementary school (Section 12). Schools are barred from collecting capitation fees or screening children, and the Act lays down fines for resorting to either of these practices (Section 13).	These provisions strive to make primary education more inclusive. The extent of reservation in private schools was controversial, and criticised both for going too far and not going far enough. However, the Act does not specify how local authorities will monitor whether private schools are actually mainstreaming under-privileged children into regular classes, and not discriminating against them.
The Act lays down norms and standards on matters such as pupil-teacher ratios, infrastructure and teachers. Establishment and recognition is contingent upon meeting these norms. Existing schools have three years to comply with these norms, and the Act lays down penalties for infractions (Section 19).	Some commentators have pointed out that these norms are most likely to affect lower-tier private schools, and thus, could reduce the number of schooling options available to lower-income families.
The Act also lays down duties for teachers, including regular and punctual attendance, completing the curriculum, assessing the learning ability of children and holding regular meetings with parents. Failure to fulfil these duties invites disciplinary action under service rules (Section 24).	
Duties imposed on parents	
The 2009 Act requires every parent or guardian to admit her child or ward in a neighbourhood school. The 2005 Bill empowered the School Management Committee, comprising parents, local authority officials, and teachers, to punish a parent for failure to enrol his or her child, by requiring the parent to provide child care in school as a form of community service.	The 2009 Act imposes a duty on parents, but does not provide for a penalty. It strikes the right balance, as parents who are economically and socially vulnerable, such as homeless adults, and migrant or daily wage labourers, are more likely to falter in fulfilling this duty. Penalising vulnerable adults would be against the spirit of ensuring that their children access decent education

Summing up:

The 2009 Act has some compelling positives. It strives to be inclusive, and to ensure equality of access. It provides for parental involvement in schools, learning from experiences in various states such as Karnataka, where community involvement has made schools more accountable. It sends a clear message that children must be safe from violence and harassment in school.

But many argue the Act is uneven. It neglects accountability and equality of outcomes, and does not explicitly incorporate monitoring and evaluation. The Act also seems to conflate inclusiveness with a neglect for academic standards – often described as the “soft bigotry of low expectations” - which does a disservice to less-privileged children rather than levelling the ground for them.

*86th Constitution Amendment Act 2002.

Concluding remarks

The decade between 1996 and 2006 has seen enormous investment in the field of elementary education. Unfortunately, financial allocations still remain inadequate and do not match the rhetoric of government commitment to universalising elementary education. There has also been steady progress in strengthening the legal framework to provide equitable access to elementary education. However, enforcing these legal provisions continue to remain a challenge. This mixed picture of progress and problems came through strongly in the 2006 Survey, the findings of which are presented in the next four chapters and form the basis for this Report.

Chapter 3

THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AT PRIMARY STAGE

The status of primary schooling in rural areas in the PROBE States of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh is the focus of this chapter and the next. In Chapter 3, we look at the primary-school environment, and in Chapter 4, the home environment of a child in the 6-12 age group. In both chapters, we compare the findings of the 2006 PROBE Revisited Survey and the 1996 PROBE Survey. Chapter 6 takes us away from the PROBE States to Himachal Pradesh. It looks at how primary schooling has changed between 1996 and 2006 in this better-performing state. The intervening chapter (Chapter 5) presents findings on upper primary schooling in the PROBE States based on the 2006 Survey. Upper primary schooling in Himachal, based on the same survey, is discussed in Chapter 6.

The previous chapter gives an idea of changes in the policy environment over the decade 1996 to 2006 with regard to schooling, most visible in the efforts made under DPEP and SSA to improve access and quality of education. What did the 2006 Survey find in terms of changes on the ground? Were there more schools? How was their physical infrastructure, facilities, size of enrolment, staffing? What changes have there been in the type of teachers recruited, and the type of training received? How were the schools functioning in terms of teachers present, teachers teaching, children present? These are some of the issues examined in this chapter.

3.1 *Expansion of the government schooling system*

3.1.1 *Access to primary schooling has improved*

Provision for primary schooling has grown substantially since 1996. Inadequate access for disadvantaged groups in particular was highlighted in the PROBE Report, drawing attention to such problems as children from lower caste groups unable to attend schools in upper caste hamlets because of social norms. There have been concerted efforts by the government to draw in children who have never been enrolled in school, through the setting up of "alternate schools" in remote and underserved areas. The Education Guarantee Scheme in Madhya Pradesh, begun in 1997, was among the more prominent of these schemes. Similar exercises were undertaken in other states. While most "alternate schools" did not initially go beyond class 3, over the decade between 1996 and 2006, the majority have been upgraded to regular primary schools (up to class 5). In the 237 villages visited in the 2006 Survey, all government schools went upto class 5 or further. The

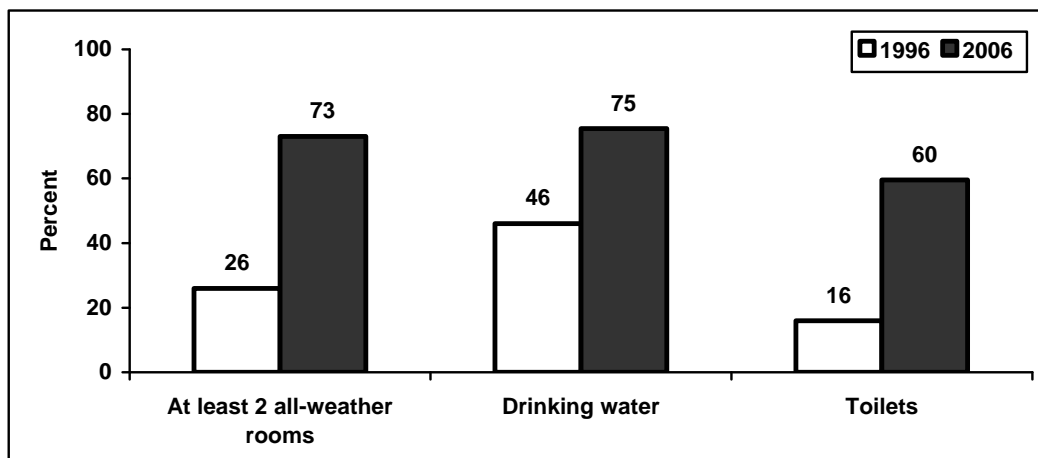
government had set up as many as 56 new schools in these villages in the ten years between the two surveys, moving much closer to its objective of providing universal access to primary schooling. A majority of households said that it took their child less than 10 minutes to reach school. Only 5 per cent of households reported that it took him/her more than 30 minutes.

When speaking of government schools, it is a mistake to assume that they are somewhat similar in terms of quality of infrastructure, the number of teachers appointed and the size of enrolment. This is due to many reasons. Within a state, the most important reason is differences in levels of funding, for example, between local body schools and those under the State Department of Education. But there are also differences on account of location. Schools which are accessible may have more teachers (and also more female teachers), since teachers (and particularly female teachers) prefer to avoid postings to remote villages in the interiors. Accessible schools may also have more teachers present, because teachers do not face problems of connectivity, and because these schools are more likely to be visited by education authorities. There are also variations across states, average enrolment in primary schools is low in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, higher in Uttar Pradesh, and highest in Bihar, reflecting the relatively low population density in the former two states, and the high density in the latter two. This heterogeneity has to be kept in mind, even as we discuss what the situation is, on average, in the rest of the chapter.

3.1.2 Infrastructure and facilities have improved but gaps remain

Construction of new schools has gone hand in hand with the provision of additional classrooms, drinking water facilities and toilets. Thus, while schooling infrastructure was found to be in a dismal state in 1996, it has improved significantly between 1996 and 2006. Fig. 3.1 highlights some important aspects of this improvement. Nearly three-quarters of all schools had at least 2 all-weather rooms in 2006 compared to only a quarter of schools in 1996. Drinking water facilities were available in three-fourths of schools, compared to less than half in 1996. Toilets were available in 60 per cent of schools compared to only 16 per cent in 1996.

Fig. 3.1 Infrastructure changes between 1996 and 2006



Notes: 1. The figures give the proportions of primary schools with the specified facilities.

2. All-weather rooms are defined as pakka rooms with non-leaking roofs.

Source: School surveys: PROBE, 1996; PROBE Revisited, 2006.

In spite of the improvements in infrastructure, enormous gaps remain. There were still schools without buildings and schools in buildings in danger of collapse. The teacher in a primary school running in a rented building in Debermoh, in Banka, Bihar was frustrated – “Rs 40,000 has been given to provide hand-pump and toilet, but that money has not been used yet. There is no school building, to begin with (*chapkai aur shauchalay ke liye 40,000 aaya hai, lekin us paise ko abhi upyog mein nahi lagaaya gaya hai. vidyaalaya ka bhavan hi nahi hai*)”.

Similar situations of schools urgently in need of buildings were reported by parents in Benipura in Sheopur, Madhya Pradesh and Panhirwas in Sikar, Rajasthan. Parents in Kuddi in Bhabua, Bihar¹ reported schools being flooded in the rains on account of leaking roofs, and hence unable to function. There were reports of the absence of school boundary walls in many states. The primary-school teacher in Basedi in Dholpur, Rajasthan complained, “the absence of a boundary wall is a problem...animals come into the premises and villagers also sit around here (...*chaardiwari na hone se pareshani hai...jaanwar school mein aa jaate hain, log bhi yahin baithte hain*)”. While more toilets are available, more than half of them were not functional. In addition, separate toilets for girls were not available in close to two-thirds (65 per cent) of all schools, and functional in only half of the schools where they had been provided. Parents were very unhappy about this.

While the majority of schools had usable blackboards, they didn't necessarily have chalk and duster, or even a place to store the school register. The class 1 teacher in the primary school in Kher Khutti in Banka, Bihar told the researchers, “teaching is hindered because of the unavailability of chalk and dusters...cannot keep the attendance register safely because there is no trunk (*chalk duster na hone ke kaaran, pathan-paathan bandhit hoti hai...baksa nahi hone ke kaaran register surakshit nahi rakh paate hain*)”. Playgrounds were available in only three-fifths of schools, suggesting that even this cannot be taken for granted for schools in rural areas. Libraries were available in just over 10 per cent of schools, and electric lights and fans in 7 per cent of schools at most. Clearly, there is a considerable way to go.

3.1.3 Incentive schemes have expanded

The overarching purpose of school incentive schemes is to make schooling more affordable for parents and more attractive for children. The purpose is to draw children in, and also to encourage them to attend regularly, and to impact their learning. In 1996, incentives being offered in the schools were reported to be patchy and the coverage limited. Incentive schemes were far more extensive in 2006.

Free textbooks are one of the two centrally-sponsored incentives given to all children. While in 1996, less than half the schools reported that they had distributed free textbooks, this was true for 99 per cent of schools in 2006. Children without textbooks, or with a textbook that was not for the grade in which they were enrolled, was a disturbing finding in 1996. This situation has changed dramatically, with children visibly in possession of some textbooks. The majority of children (82%) interviewed in the 2006 household survey also confirmed that they had received free textbooks. However, there were some complaints about the untimely delivery of the complete set of books, and this dilutes the potential benefit of the free textbook scheme.

The other universal incentive scheme in operation, and the most striking change since 1996, is the introduction of cooked midday meals in schools. Though the midday meal scheme was introduced in 1995, at the time of the PROBE Survey in 1996, most states were implementing it as a dry ration scheme, whereby children were being given 3 kg of grain to take home (conditional on 80 per cent attendance in school). In 2006, we found that hot cooked meals were served to children in 86 per cent of schools, and in these schools, 93 per cent of the teachers said that all children consumed the meal. This is important in the light of the fact that not all parents were reported to be keen on the midday meal scheme. The 2006 Survey also found that the majority of teachers (72%) were positive about the introduction of this scheme, a particularly significant finding, since negative responses from teachers are often highlighted in discussions on the midday meal scheme. What is also encouraging is that several hygienic practices were being followed while serving the midday meal. Children washed their hands before eating in 63 per cent of schools. The space was cleaned before eating in 65 per cent of schools, and in 78 per cent after eating. While this is impressive, there is also considerable scope for improvement.

An important role that the midday meal scheme is supposed to perform is that of socialization, whereby children learn to eat together, share a meal, and get socially integrated. However, we did come across

¹Parents in a few other villages in Bihar also had similar complaints.

instances in which parents seem to be keen to keep certain boundaries. In 21 per cent of those schools where plates were supplied, teachers said that children brought their own plates. The practice of actually keeping plates of children of different castes separately was reported in only a few schools – these constituted 2 per cent of the schools where plates had been supplied. Chandrika Rai, a 40 year old uneducated labourer from a very poor SC household in a village in Dhanbad in Jharkhand spoke powerfully of caste discrimination in the context of the midday meal. “The worker in the centre is Brahman, and we are Harijans. When our children are given food, they are made to sit separately from the other children, and the plates they use have to be washed by their parents. Or there is a pond behind the school where the children go and wash their plates themselves. One child broke his hand when he fell into the pond [while washing his plate] (*kendra ke jo kaaryakarta hain, woh Brahman bhadra hain, aur ham log harijan hain. kendra mein jab hamaare bachchon ko khaana diya jaata hai, tab harijan bachchon ko anya bacchon se alag alag baithaya jaata hai aur jo harijan bachcha khaata hai, plate uske ghar-waalon ko dhona padta hai ya phir kendra ke peecche talaab hain ...khud bacchen us talaab par jaakar apne bartan dhote hain. taalab mein girne ke kaaran ek bachche ka haath toot chuka hai*)”.

Table 3.2 Midday meal factsheet

Proportion of primary schools which report a functional midday meal scheme	86
Proportion of these schools:	
which report that all children eat the midday meal	93
where the midday meal is cooked on the premises	85
where teacher felt that the midday meal should continue	72
where children washed their hands before eating	63
where the area was cleaned before eating	65
where children bring their own plates in schools that give plates	21
which report that plates are kept separately for different social groups	2

Interviews with parents and enrolled children in the PROBE States confirm that the cooked midday meal scheme was being widely implemented. Close to 84 per cent of children were receiving cooked midday meals. However, both the school survey and the household survey indicate that the extent to which the midday meal scheme has been implemented varied considerably across states. In Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the midday meal scheme was running in nearly all schools, whereas the situation was quite uneven in Bihar. The scheme was still in the process of being universalized in Bihar at the time of the 2006 Survey. Complaints from parents and children about the scheme were also commonest from households in Bihar. A monitoring report on the functioning of the scheme in Bihar and Jharkhand in 2008 found the midday meal scheme more functional in the former than the latter (see Box – Cooked Midday Meal Scheme in Bihar and Jharkhand).

Cooked Midday Meal Scheme in Bihar and Jharkhand

A study conducted in five districts in Bihar (Aurangabad, Gaya, Jahanabad, Nawada and Rohtas) found that 93 per cent of teachers reported that hot, cooked midday meals were being served in their schools, and close to all students and parents corroborated this. The picture was less rosy for Jharkhand. A study conducted in six districts in Jharkhand (Bokaro, Dhanbad, Giridih, Koderma, Hazaribag and Chatra) found that in many areas, the

midday meal scheme had still to be regularized. In Bokaro, in particular, it was not being served because of non-supply of foodgrains.

Source: First Half-Yearly Monitoring Report on SSA and Midday Meals, 1st August 2008 to 31st January 2009, by Jamia Milia Islamia, Delhi (for Bihar), and Xavier Institute of Social Service, Ranchi (for Jharkhand).

Apart from these universal incentives, there are also targeted incentives sanctioned by some of the state governments. These include scholarships and free uniforms for specified vulnerable categories (girls and children from SC/ST groups). While scholarships were reported to be given in 63 per cent of schools in 1996, the figure was 78 per cent in 2006. The proportion of schools in which free uniforms were being distributed rose from 9 per cent of schools in 1996 to 52 per cent of schools in 2006. However, much lower proportions of children, interviewed during the household survey, reported receiving such benefits. Only 37 per cent of girls had received free uniforms and 34 per cent of SC/ST children had received scholarships in the previous year. To some extent, this reflects the fact that these schemes were not implemented in all states.

The enormous expansion in the number of schools, the improvement in facilities in schools, and the increase in incentive schemes have been facilitated largely by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan working through education committees.² The state SSAs use education committees as a “single window” through which they channel funds to schools for various schemes, and we discuss the functioning of these committees in the next section.

3.1.4 Education committees play a larger, but limited, role

The larger role of education committees is noticeable when comparing the school environment in 1996 and 2006. In 1996, such organizations were barely visible, though 72 per cent of head teachers reported that a Village Education Committee (VEC) had been formed. In 2006, we found that nearly all (96%) government schools visited had some committee³ in place, and that they were making a contribution. Teachers were teamed with local leaders and parents in VECs; and with parents in Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). These committees were required to have a certain composition, so that they could be representative of the wider community and include socially disadvantaged groups. Staff at a Block Resource Centre (BRC) in Dewas, Madhya Pradesh discussed⁴ problems with filling posts according to quotas. He pointed out that, for example, the President and the Vice President could not both belong to the “general caste”. In addition, one of these posts has to be allocated to a woman. The Block Academic Coordinator in Dewas claimed that during elections no mother came to vote, and those that were appointed hardly came to attend meetings: “They don’t let the women come; anyway, they do not want to come, and they do not come (*mahilaaon ko aane bhi nahi dete, woh aana chaahte bhi nahi hain, aur aate bhi nahi hain*)”.

The 2006 Survey indicates that the education committees were very active in monitoring the maintenance and construction activities at the school, the delivery of incentives and the appointment of contract teachers. Across the board, they appear to have been quite successful in carrying out these activities. However, expectations that the education committees would be able to monitor children’s attendance and teaching activities at school have been belied. Certainly, the presence of the school’s head-teacher on the education committee reduces the possibility of its playing any effective monitoring role. The Survey found evidence of

²Decentralisation of management of education has been an important policy of the government over the past fifteen years, and particularly under SSA. Policy makers have perceived this to be an important way of solving many of the problems entrenched in the education system.

³In the past decade, community organizations have taken many different forms. Some states have VECs and parent bodies, such as Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and/or Mother Teacher Associations (MTAs). Some have school-based committees, such as School Development Management Committees (SDMCs) and Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti or School Education Committee (VSS).

⁴This was in the course of village studies undertaken in 2007 in one village in each of the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. These 5 villages were selected from among the villages covered in the 2006 Survey.

such a role only from one primary school in Chhapiya Buzurg in Siwan, Bihar, and these are the parents' encouraging comments.

- "Nowadays, the PTA investigates the quality of teaching. Sometimes it comes to the school to check [how it is functioning] ... on this account there is now good teaching (*aajkal abhibhaavak shiksha samiti padhai ke gunvatta ke baare me jaanch karti hai. kabhi kabhi school ke nigrani ke liye bhi aati hai...is kaaran padhai achhchi hoti hai*)", says Lalita Devi, a 40 year old OBC woman.
- "Ever since the *mukhiya* has started going to the school, the teachers are doing well...and hitting the children less (*school mein jab se mukhya ji jaane lage hain, adhyaapak log achchhe se padhai karne lage hain...aur bachchon ko kam maarte hain*)", says Kalpita Devi, a 35 year old OBC uneducated woman.

The research team focused on the functioning of the education committees in one village each in the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. One important finding was that the committees were not formed so as to be representative of the community.

- Rajnath, a committee member in a village in Banka district, Bihar, claimed that the process of appointment to the education committees was never transparent and they were formed without anyone's consent: "The *mukhiya* sets the committee...from his friends, those he knows, he sets in place his own men (*mukhiya tayaar kar lete hain...apne friend, apne jaan pahechan, apne aadmi set kar dete hain*)"
- In Madhya Pradesh fierce elections were reported for the posts in the PTA in 2006.⁵ The state later abandoned elections for PTAs on the grounds that that they cause too much trouble. In 2007, it was reported that in the Government Boys' Primary School in Sumeri village in Dewas district, one of the parents of the boy securing the highest marks in the school is appointed President of the PTA. The head teacher is always the Secretary. In this village, the committee's other members did not have a role to play -- the President and the head-teacher could not even recall who the other members of the PTA were.
- The head teacher in Phursania in Farukkabad district in UP reported a somewhat similar situation in UP. He felt there was "no point in having an election in the village...we call those parents who are regular and ask them...mostly we select members from among them (*gaon mein election ka koi matlab hi nahi hain... jo jo parents phir bhi regular hain, hum unko bula lete hain aur poochhte hain... jyaadatar unmein se hi members chun lete hain*)".

There were also indications that the committee did not function as was expected.

- Anita was a parent and a committee member in Phursania in Farukkabad district in UP. She and other members reported that they signed registers detailing meetings held without them taking place.
- Rajnath from Banka district in Bihar, whom we quoted earlier with regard to a lack of due process in the formation of the education committees, also commented on their lack of effectiveness as a monitoring agency: "Committees are formed to supervise the school...but nobody does it (*committee school ke dekh-rekh ke liye banaaye gaye hain...par koi dekh-rekh nahi karte hain*)".

Overall, the community lacked awareness about who was on their school committee, how often it met, and what its role was.

These state-mandated committees have little in common with village education committees mobilized by the community-based organisation Bodh in Alwar and Jaipur (see Box – Achieving Effective Local Governance of Education) where they go beyond community participation and push for community ownership of schools. Bodh works on the premise that all are equal partners – the local community, local government officials, the CBO, and teachers, and efforts are made to work in a collaborative rather than confrontational manner.

⁵The President and the Headmaster are the joint holders of the school account and there were allegations that this gave the President an opportunity to siphon off some additional money.

Achieving Effective Local Governance of Education

*Sveta Dave-Chakravarty**

Bodh Shiksha Samiti was founded in 1987 to work on evolving community-based education in the slums of Jaipur. It started work in Alwar District in 1990 by partnering with communities to establish Bodhshalas, community schools, in the remote and education-deprived villages of Thanagazi and Umrain blocks, inhabited to a large extent by Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, Sikhs, Meo-Muslims and nomadic communities (Banjara, Nat, Lohariya, Bawariya, among others).

Bodh Shiksha Samiti works towards social transformation through education. Motivated by the agenda of inclusion and equity, Bodh advocates decentralized governance and local-level decision-making to fulfill local developmental needs. By patiently engaging families and communities in dialogue on education, Bodh seeks to promote democratic processes for community ownership of—and not mere community participation in—education in the villages and the disadvantaged urban areas of Alwar and Jaipur.

Over time, Panchayats have become aware of their roles and responsibilities with regard to the education of children in their communities, and the ripple effect of engaged communities and their Panchayats has resulted in several villages approaching Bodh to help them establish community schools. Bodh supports education in their government schools. Bodh has established 44 Bodhshalas in Alwar District and is working with 40 government schools in partnership with 38 Gram Panchayats.

By redefining the meaning of community participation, BODH has been successful in evolving a system of school management that offers an alternative to the traditional hierarchical and non-engaged methods practiced in government schools. Collective deliberation, participation and collective decision-making are the main tools for community involvement and self-determination. Bodh's central premise, that local community, local government officials, CBOs and teachers are *equal partners* in the provision of quality education, has ensured that the initiative engenders collaboration rather than confrontation.

Multi-stakeholder groups in Umrain and Thanagazi have found that as the opacity between school and community is removed and the school's understanding of the supportive role of the community, education reforms automatically happen. Involving government school head-teachers and teachers in their deliberations, community groups start mobilizing resources and seeking the support of elected representatives to improve education provision in the village. Annual school plans are decided in Gram Sabhas, and education issues discussed, solutions found and implementation monitored in community meetings.

This ability to mobilize community groups and initiate them into powerful decision-making bodies and pressure groups that lead education development in their communities by demanding accountability and transparency, is a critical skill of Bodh. Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) were established to overcome the problem of the State mandated—but effectively dysfunctional—SDMC, which had a structural problem: only the school teachers were signatories; the structure therefore did not confer decision-making powers on the community. VEDCs were formulated to overcome this problem by involving community and school representatives as joint signatories; since SDMCs were in any case not functioning, the VEDCs have become the local education development body. Despite the fact that the State's PRI legislation merely accords promotional powers (of raising awareness and promoting enrollment) at the village level, VEDCs take their brief to develop the local school very seriously. These VEDCs have now been federated at Cluster-level (8-10 villages) and strengthen their voice in demanding public resources.

In November 2008, without Bodh's intervention, the Village Education Committees of Umrain Block, Alwar District, sent an application to the Education Secretary, Government of Rajasthan, requesting that the Bodhshalas in the Block *be converted to Government schools*, and that *the management of all existing government schools in the Block be officially handed over to the local body*, the Village Education Development Committee, in each village. The application was moved up with strong support from the Pradhan of Umrain, and at District level from the Zilla Pramukh.

This demand is testimony to the success of Bodh's strategy in rural Rajasthan: partnering with communities (rather than with the State) is leading to effective local governance and the demand from the ground for enabling legislation—devolution of financial powers and delineation of roles and responsibilities—for decentralized education management. Recognizing the significance of the demand, the Education Secretary visited the block schools to assess the preparedness of the communities, and, suitably impressed, promised to take this proposal forward.

Further, as a result of this community engagement with education, including girls' education, some social norms appear to be changing. In the early years, Bodh organized classes in *Kishori Samoohs* for adolescent girls who had little or no education. Today, there are fewer such groups, as most girls are enrolled at the appropriate age in primary schools. Demand from parents to provide facilities for girls completing primary education led (i) to the upgradation of strategically located primary Bodhshalas to elementary level in Umrain and (ii) to the establishment of 2 residential girls' schools in Thanagazi and Jaipur, which, established as Middle Schools, are now Senior Secondary schools as the girls move up. A decision to shift girls from Thanagazi to the Jaipur school due to the difficulty of finding qualified teachers willing to be based in Thanagazi, was reversed when communities protested. The local community leaders believe the school is needed in Thanagazi to continue to influence the local education environment, as a visible symbol of changing cultural norms.

Bodh has also found that as communities identify education as the "common good," they transcend traditional caste and class barriers to identify and address education need and get involved with the provision of need-based quality education for their children. In numerous villages across Umrain and Thanagazi, traditionally hostile communities send their children to the same Bodhshala. One such example, Sahodi ka Bas, the village that inspired 15 other villages to move the VEDC petition to the Education Secretary, has two communities, Meo Muslims and Sikhs. In the beginning, the prevailing hostility between the communities made it extremely difficult to work towards any positive change. Consistent impartial dialogue on education has brought about a marked change, however. Today, the Bodhshala, extremely well-resourced and the only Bodhshala so far to become a Government school (well ahead of other petitions to the Department), stands as a thriving example of transcendence of social divisions.

As the VEDCs take charge of the organization of their community's education, Bodh has moved increasingly away from its lead role as catalyst for mobilizing community around education to that of technical resource agency for improving education quality. At the instance of the community groups, Bodh has upgraded several Bodhshalas to upper-primary level and built capacity in several government schools. If the Rajasthan Government does indeed pass a legislation enabling VEDCs to take charge officially of the management of local schools, with State funding, and technical support provided by a third party (in this case Bodh), we may have a viable, sustainable model of decentralized governance for quality education.

*Based on regular interaction with Bodh, and on discussions with Shubhra Singh and Divya Jain, Bodh.

3.2 *Teachers in government schools: Background and concerns*

3.2.1 *Changes in profile of teachers*

The expansion of the government schooling system has meant a massive recruitment of teachers in the past ten years. Comparing the situations in 1996 and 2006, we found significant changes in the terms of recruitment and service of teachers. This has had far-reaching consequences on the profile of teachers. Has it also affected accountability?

In 1996, the vast majority of teachers were regular government employees, with permanent service. But over the years, states have increasingly chosen to recruit contract teachers. The foundation and attractiveness of the contract teacher scheme as well as likely problems have been discussed in some detail separately (see Box on contract teachers). Different states have travelled down this road to different extents. MP, where in 1996 the para teacher scheme was already in operation, has stopped recruiting permanent teachers altogether. In 2006, MP had the highest proportion of contract teachers among the low-literacy states in our study. In Rajasthan, the proportion of contract teachers was found to be the lowest, although the Shiksha Karmi scheme which was one of the earliest variants began here (see Box -- Contract Teachers). The 2006 Survey found that the percentage of teachers who were contract teachers was as high as 46 per cent.

Contract Teachers

Contract teachers are locally recruited and appointed by the Panchayat or Village Education Committee or School Management Committee to a particular school. They are paid less than regular teachers and they get fixed term contracts of usually one year. No pre-service training is required. Most contract teachers, however, have to go through an induction for 20-40 days.

The practice of appointing contract teachers builds on the earlier experience with two schemes: In 1984, Himachal Pradesh introduced the volunteer teacher scheme in order to improve the quality of education by providing a second teacher in the school. Rajasthan, on the other hand, appointed Shiksha Karmis, in 1990, as a substitute for the trained but habitually absent permanent teacher in remote habitations.

Several advantages and benefits are attributed to the introduction of contract teachers. To begin with, it has reduced (though not eliminated) teacher shortages within a short period. Lower salaries have enabled the State to recruit many more teachers into primary schools within the limited resources available to them. Being flexible with the educational qualifications and pre-service training has meant recruitment from a larger pool. Moreover, recruitment and payment through village bodies potentially makes for better accountability to the community. Being local recruits, they are not likely to be under pressure to get themselves transferred, and they also do not have to commute long distances to and from the school, which could contribute to lowering the rates of absenteeism. Contract teachers are more likely to understand the language and culture of the students, being from the same milieu, and thereby potentially contribute to greater learning in school.

On the other hand, recruitment of contract teachers through local village bodies has increased the likelihood of making the teacher cadre even more politicized. Selected candidates are often recommended by politicians. This certainly does not lead to greater accountability. It is also the case that the most of the selected candidates, while being local, belong to more privileged social groups. They are not necessarily at an advantage in terms of effective communication with tribal children enrolled in the school. It also has consequences for accountability.

It would be fair to say that, by and large, contract teachers are underpaid and not equipped to fulfill the expectations of teaching primary school children, particularly first generation learners from remote, poor and disadvantaged

These developments have contributed to very visible changes in the gender and caste background of teachers. The proportion of female primary school teachers was found to have increased from 21 per cent in 1996 to 37 per cent in 2006. Among contract teachers, the proportion of females (53%) was substantially higher than among permanent teachers (30%) (see Table 3.3). To some extent, this is because contract teachers include more recent recruits compared to permanent teachers – with the passage of time, more females are coming into the workforce. Recruiting female teachers is also a requirement under the contract teacher scheme.

Table 3.3 Permanent and contract teachers

Proportion (%)	Permanent Teachers	Contract Teachers	All
Gender			
Female	30	53	37
Social background			
“General castes”	43	35	40
OBC	38	39	38
SC / ST	18	24	21
Non-Hindu	1	2	1
Education			
Class 12 and less	41	45	42
Graduate / post-graduate	59	55	58
Training			
Diploma in education/JBT/CT	56	18	40
Degree training (B Ed)	27	11	21
Only in-service training	8	37	20
No training	9	34	19

Source: School survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

Looking at caste differences between permanent and contract teachers is extremely useful (see Table 3.3). Permanent teachers are little over half of all teachers (54%) in 2006. These represent highly prized appointments. The majority of permanent teachers are the advantaged “general castes” (43%). The proportion of OBCs is lower, but still large (39%). OBCs in rural areas also represent an advantaged group. The proportion of SC / ST teachers, who are part of disadvantaged social groups, is somewhat low (18%). Contract teaching jobs are low-paid, but still valued judging from the substantial proportion of “general castes” (35%) and OBCs (39%). SC / STs are more visible among contract (24%) than among permanent teachers (18%).

In terms of gender differences within these social groups, the “general caste” contract teachers are primarily female. Both males and females were well represented among the OBC contract teachers. The SC / ST teachers were primarily male, in both types of appointments. These differences reflect higher levels of education among women from “general castes” and OBCs, compared to Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Recruiting of contract teachers has meant new inroads for females from more advantaged caste groups and has increased the proportions of OBC and SC / ST males in the system. How these changes in social background (caste and gender) affect the functioning of the school, and the accountability of teachers in particular, is a matter of considerable importance. We discuss this in the next section.

The 2006 Survey found that educational qualifications⁶ of permanent and contract teachers were not greatly different. The proportion of those with only school-level education was 41 (45) per cent among permanent

⁶ The majority (62%) of contract teachers are under 30 years of age. Here they are in sharp contrast to the permanent teachers among whom close to 30 per cent are over 50. Educational levels are generally higher among younger age groups, and this factor is partly responsible for the high educational qualifications of contract teachers.

(contract) teachers. Graduates and post-graduates were the larger proportion – 59 (55) per cent among permanent (contract) teachers (see Table 3.3). The extent of teacher training is the key difference between the two groups. Eighty-three per cent of permanent teachers had had teacher training, whereas this was true for only 29 per cent of contract teachers. Under the contract teacher scheme, states have recruited individuals without pre-service training, and then attempted to fill the gap (see Box).

In-service Teacher Training at Primary Level: New Pathways

Large scale recruitment of contract teachers was reported in Jharkhand in 2007, and the new recruits were required to do a distance education programme through the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). This course was for two years and was a teacher education programme for in-service primary school teachers leading to a Diploma in Primary Education. The course was also open to primary school teachers in Chhatisgarh, Jammu and Kashmir, Sikkim and the North-Eastern states. Education authorities in Jharkhand were very pleased that their recruits were given this opportunity.

Much money has been spent under SSA and through District Institutes for Education and Training (DIETs) to build the capacity of teachers through regular in-service training programmes. This is partly to make up for the gaps in training among contract teachers, but also to improve the quality of education in general. The training programmes have been subject-related – for example, how to teach mathematics, how to become sensitive to issues of discrimination arising from gender, caste, disability and so on. Surprisingly, close to 40 per cent of contract teachers had received only these short bouts of in-service training. Over a third (34%) had not received any training at all. This presents a sorry picture of the kind of inputs that have been going into the primary school child, especially in light of the fact that contract teachers constituted 46 per cent of the teacher cadre during the 2006 Survey.

Any real changes in the child's schooling experience can only come about through the agency of the teacher, and it is in this context that we have probed changes in the terms and conditions of teacher recruitment, and the subsequent reflection of these changes on the social and educational background of teachers. In comparison to 1996, the teacher cadre in 2006 was younger, more feminised, and more locally-based. For contract teachers, while entry requirements in terms of pre-service training have been reduced, security of employment and the fixing of salaries in accordance with the recommendations of the Pay Commissions have been taken away. In the next section, we report on teachers' concerns voiced in the course of the 2006 Survey.

3.2.2 Teachers' concerns

The concerns voiced by teachers in 2006 echoed what was shared in 1996. Many of these concerns were related directly to their teaching responsibilities. The most significant problem reported was that schools had too few teachers. Apart from their teaching load, teachers had day-to-day responsibility for the supervision of the midday meal scheme and the filling of the attendance register. At the start of the year, they were involved in enrolment campaigns. Through the year teachers had to provide regular data to the authorities at block level. They also had to report on other incentive schemes, and to work closely with the community in education committees. Much of the work with the latter appeared to involve construction, as mentioned earlier.

Shortage of teachers: Nearly three-fifths of class 1 teachers interviewed complained of the shortage of teachers. As an irate teacher of the primary school in Dudhiyawa (Purvi Champaran district, Bihar) said, "Firstly, three teachers have to teach five grades, and on top of that the authorities keep calling us [to the office] (*ek to yahan teen teacher milkar paanch kakshaon ko padhao aur doosra samay-samay par adhikaari bula lete hai*)".

Curriculum and language related issues in textbooks and classroom transactions: Over and above the problem of having to teach large numbers of children, primary school teachers complained about the difficulties related

to the content of the prescribed textbooks. The class 1 teacher of the primary school in Dharkiro (Dhanbad district, Jharkhand) mentioned how “the questions and answers in the children’s textbooks are quite difficult for them [to understand] (*bachchon ke kitaab mein prashn uttar hain jo unke liye kaafi mushkil hain*)”. Teaching Class 1 children in Hindi was a problem. Teachers are not necessarily equipped to teach in the child’s mother-tongue. The Class 1 teacher of the primary school in Burjangsar (earlier in Churu and now in Bikaner, Rajasthan) mentioned how “language is a problem -- they don’t understand Hindi, only their local dialect...[so] they take longer to learn (*language se dikkat aati hain -- hindi nahi samajhte, sirf apni local language samajhte hain...seekhne mein inhe samay lagta hai*)”.

Illiterate and poorly educated parents: Problems associated with teaching children of poor and illiterate parents were mentioned by close to one-sixth of teachers. These are a sample of the teachers’ comments indicating parents’ limited engagement with the schooling of their children.

- “Parents are poor; we have to go to their houses every day to persuade them to send their children to school (*garib janta hain, inke bachchon ko hamey ghar se baraabar samjhaakar daily aane ke liye kehna padta hai*)”, said a teacher.
- “Parents don’t pay attention to their children’s studies. Even if we tell them to send their children regularly to school, they don’t pay any attention (*bachchon ke maata pita padhai ke baare mein dhyaan nahi dete hain. Jab ham log unse kehte hain ki apne bachchon ko niyमित school bhejen tab bhi woh dhyaan nahi dete hain*),” said a teacher in Bagdar (Jhalawar district, Rajasthan).
- Parents don’t bother to send children clean and tidy, children are not regular and parents take no interest in their children’s studies (*bachchon ko saaf-suthra nahi bhejte hain, bachchen niyमित school nahi aate aur abibhaavak bachchon ko padhaane mein koi ruchi nahi rakhte*)”, said the Class 1 teacher of the upper primary school in Kultana (Pali district, Rajasthan).

Low and irregular salaries: In terms of difficult work conditions, contract teachers resented being paid low and irregular salaries. The problems were most acute for contract teachers in Bihar. A Class 1 teacher from Chana Badgaav (Bhagalpur district, Bihar) said, “The pay is very little and we don’t get paid on time. The salary we get should be given by the government and not by the panchayat authority (*maneya bahut kum milta hain, aur samay par nahi milta. Vetan jo milta hai, sarkaar ke maadhyam se milna chaahiye, panchayat rajya se nahi milna chaahiye*). His experience was echoed by the class 1 teacher of the primary school in Belari (Bhabua district, Bihar) who said that they got paid every 5-6 months.

The 2006 Survey found an increase in the proportion of teachers who pursue a secondary source of livelihood, possibly because there were more contract teachers in the system with low and irregular salaries. A substantial proportion of teachers who live in the same village where the school is located, do farming in addition to their work in school, and this included both permanent and contract teachers.

Poor travel conditions to school: For some of the teachers, getting to school is an ordeal. “Travelling from far away is a problem. I come 30 km by cycle (*door se aane mein samasya hai. 30 km cycle se aate hain*)”, said the Class 1 male teacher in Sukhad (Shahdol district, MP). Those who were dependent on public transport were further constrained by limited frequency of such services in many areas, and the distance of the village from the bus-stop. In this context, appointments to schools in “road-point villages” were preferred by teachers.

On the positive side, with the appointment of locally recruited contract teachers, the accessibility of schools for teachers has increased considerably between 1996 and 2006. There has been an increase in the proportion of Class 1 teachers residing in the same village from 37 per cent in 1996 to 50 per cent in 2006. The average commuting time to school in 2006 was as low as 20 minutes.

Problems voiced by female teachers: Female teachers, in general, struggled with the double burden of responsibilities at school and home. In addition, difficult travel to and from the school was cited as a problem by nearly half the female teachers. “There is no transport to travel to and from the school; I also feel unsafe, it’s isolated...one has to travel through the jungle (*aane jaane ke liye gaadi ka abhav, asuraksha bhi mehsoos karte*)”.

hain, ekaant jagah hai...jangal se gujarna padta hai”, said a female teacher in Sildaury (Paschimi Singhbhum district, Jharkhand). A female teacher in Tigaria Sancha (Dewas district, MP) coped with the difficulties of getting to and from the school by travelling on the pillion of a male teacher’s motorcycle, and was annoyed that the villagers gossiped about them. Another female teacher complained how “during the rains the road to the school becomes very bad (*barsaat mein school ke raaste kaafi kharaab ho jaate hain*)”. In addition to

What Motivates and Demotivates Primary School Teachers in Government Schools in Andhra Pradesh?*

Jos Mooij

Why are so many teachers demotivated and dissatisfied despite obvious progress and widespread acknowledgement of the importance of education?

One of the major complaints mentioned over and over again in the discussions is related to the alleged lack of appreciation for teachers by the department. In one of the discussions, for instance, the teachers reported that “the officials always try to find fault with the teachers’ work and do not give a word of appreciation to a hardworking teacher...”. They further complained that inspection and monitoring are reduced to a formality. Inspectors and *mandal* resource persons do not provide feedback or professional support. Other demotivating factors mentioned by the teachers included the increasing load of non-academic work (i.e. filling in forms, reporting progress), unfavourable student/teacher ratios, multi-grade teaching, lack of support from the community, political interference, and over-qualification.

Why do government teachers (want to) become teachers? Interestingly, there were two different kinds of arguments. The first had to do with the development of the nation: moulding children into good citizens, or ‘carving the future of the country’, as one of the teachers expressed it. The second had to do with more mundane considerations: It is relatively easy to get a job as a teacher; it gives a reasonable salary and secure income; and, there is no better alternative. On the whole, the younger teachers emphasized these more mundane considerations while the elder generation seemed to be more inspired by the higher ideals. All, however, emphasized the inherent respectability of the profession.

In all seven focus group discussions, the teachers agreed uniformly that there has been a considerable decline in their social status over the years. In the past, “the community vested a lot of trust in teachers and approached them for any sort of advice or assistance. Nowadays, the respect that teachers get is much less”. The most reported reasons for this decline in social status are: the amount of non-academic work, which forces teachers to spend less time on teaching; the fact that they no longer reside in the villages; the appointment of volunteers or para-teachers suggesting that anybody who has studied up to grades 10+2 can become a teacher; political interference in the schools; and their own indulgence in bad habits (drinking, visiting bars, etc.).

Two phenomena are worth noting. The first has to do with the contradictory effects of rural development. Due to increased levels of literacy, the presence of television and newspapers, and the intensified interaction between village and town, teachers have lost some of their magic charm. They are no longer the only ones who are educated. They are no longer needed to bring news or inform villagers about the world outside their village. This, however, has not led to a better or more equal relationship between the village community and the teachers. In fact, the tensions have only increased. This has to do with the second phenomenon, the widening social class gap between the teacher and the students. On the one hand, the present students in government schools are almost all children of households that were, so far, excluded from the educational system. On the other hand, the teachers themselves have been upwardly mobile. Over the years, and especially after the implementation of the recommendations of the 5th Pay Commission in 1998, the salaries of the teachers have increased. Teachers have started to see themselves as members of the middle class, and acquired middle class tastes and preferences. Among other things, this has led to the migration of teachers to the towns. As a result, their presence in the villages has become much less. At best, they are commuting teachers; at worst they are absent. This has had a very negative impact on their respect in the village. Ironically, the rise in their economic status has gone hand-in-hand with a decline in social status. As a result of their changing social class position, and in the context of an overall booming middle class, teachers have developed new aspirations for their own children. We met very few government school teachers, in the course of our fieldwork, whose children studied in the school in which they taught.

Thus, while it is true that universal education has come within the country’s reach, it is also true that new educational divisions have become more prominent. An increasing number of English-medium private schools cater to the elite and different sections of the middle class, while badly endowed government schools teaching in the local language cater mainly to children from poor and uneducated households. More than anybody else, government school teachers are confronted with these divisions in the educational system. They teach in government schools but their own children (or their younger siblings, nephews and nieces) go to private schools. They know that they will never be able to offer their students the facilities and the teaching quality that are acceptable for their own children, because – despite the rhetoric to prioritise education – allocated funds are not sufficient. It is not surprising, therefore, that teachers do not share the optimistic pronouncements of the government, and do not take part in reproducing the upbeat policy discourse.

*Based on focus group discussions in Kurnool and East Godavari, conducted by Madhu Gottumakkulu and B. Srinivasa Naik, for an IDPAD-funded study on primary education in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. The fieldwork took place in 2004-6.

insecurity during travel to the school, there was also the possibility that a teacher felt insecure even at the school. For instance, the female teacher in Jhigarghat (Mandla district, MP) complained of “drunken men around the school area (*sharaabi purush school ke paas aate hain*)”. Female teachers also complained about the lack of toilets.

This section provided some useful information about the current teacher cadre and their perceptions of the ground realities in the PROBE States. We acquired more insights into the views of teachers through discussions with teachers in Andhra Pradesh (see Box -- What Motivates and Demotivates Government School Teachers in Andhra Pradesh?).

3.3 *Functioning of government schools*

We now take a look at the functioning of government schools on a day-to-day basis: What were proportions of teachers in school during the 2006 Survey? What proportions of enrolled children attend school? How many schools had teaching activity? What were the types of teaching activities observed? How different was the situation from the time of the PROBE Survey in 1996?

3.3.1 *Teachers and pupils: proportions in school*

Secondary data indicate that there has been a huge increase in the number of children enrolled in government schools between 1996 and 2006 as well as a massive recruitment of teachers. However, teacher appointments have not kept pace with student enrolments. The Pupil Teacher Ratio PTR (based on numbers of children enrolled and teachers appointed) in the 2006 Survey was 54 (see Table 3.4), slightly higher than the figure for the 1996 Survey (50). This is the picture averaged across the PROBE States, but there was considerable variation among the states. The PTR was lowest in Rajasthan (44) and highest in Bihar (59). Teachers were also keen to be posted to schools in urban areas or villages which had good connectivity, so PTRs varied considerably within states, with children in remote areas most likely to be in single or two teacher schools, with several grades bunched together while teaching.

Official PTRs offer little indication of what is happening on the ground -- varying proportions of children and teachers are missing from school, for part of the day or the whole day. The proportion of students to teachers reportedly present on the day of the field visit was 44, much lower than the official PTR of 54 (see Table 3.4). This was the situation in all states, with child absenteeism rates greater than proportions of teachers missing from school. Looking at state-wise variations in PTRs, the divergence between the official PTR and the PTR on the day of the survey was lower and somewhat similar in MP and Rajasthan and highest in Bihar. In Bihar, while the official PTR was as high as 59, the PTR on the day of the survey was only 43.

Table 3.4 Pupil and teacher attendance in primary schools, 2006

	Pupil Teacher Ratio (official)	Pupil Teacher Ratio (on the day of the survey)	Proportion (%) of teachers present	Proportion (%) of students present (based on the register)
Uttar Pradesh	57	47	78 (85)	66
Bihar	59	43	70 (80)	53
Madhya Pradesh	53	47	86 (72)	75
Rajasthan	44	38	83 (83)	75
All	54	44	78 (79)	63

Notes: 1. PTR (official) is based on ratio of students enrolled to teachers appointed in primary schools. PTR (on the day of the survey) is based on the ratio of students to teachers reported to be present on the day of the survey.
2. Figures refer to the pre-divided states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

3. Figures in parentheses are for the situation in 1996.

Source: School surveys: PROBE, 1996; PROBE Revisited, 2006.

The 2006 Survey found that the proportion of students present in school based on the register was 63 per cent of those enrolled, lower than the figure noted in 1996 (69%). While this is extremely discouraging, it may reflect greater accuracy of data. What also needs to be noted are the striking state-wise variations with 75 per cent of children in MP and Rajasthan present compared to only 53 per cent in Bihar.

In section 3.2.1, we have discussed how there have been considerable changes in recruitment policy for teachers. Has it made a difference to improving teachers' attendance in school? The 2006 Survey figure for proportion of teachers present⁷ in school in all PROBE States taken together shows little improvement from the situation in 1996. However, the 2006 Survey did find considerable variation among states (see Table 3.4). Bihar reported the lowest (70%) and Madhya Pradesh the highest (86%) proportion of teachers present. Comparing figures for 1996 and 2006, absenteeism was found to have increased in Bihar and UP, remained the same in Rajasthan, and decreased in Madhya Pradesh. Merely appointing local teachers on contract does not solve the problem of teachers being missing from school. Absenteeism was noted among permanent and contract teachers in every one of the PROBE States. Though it was higher⁸ among permanent teachers (26%) than among contract teachers (18%), it appears that governance in the state also plays an important role in determining teachers' presence in school. Teacher absenteeism was relatively low among permanent and contract teachers in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Teacher absenteeism was highest among permanent and contract teachers in Bihar, with absenteeism among permanent teachers (38%) being greater than among contract teachers (25%). These trends indicate that the situation in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan in particular is better in 2006 than it was in 1996.

Feedback from parents and children about contract teachers has been generally positive. Here are two examples from villages where contract teachers were present and teaching.

- Children in a village in Bhabua district, Bihar spoke of Shiksha Mitras who taught them well, told them stories and played with them.
- Parents of children in the primary school in a village in Sidharthnagar district, UP report that the school functions more regularly now (when the entire responsibility of running it falls on a Shiksha Mitra) than when a regular teacher was appointed there.

But there were other villages where teachers were less accountable. One extreme case was a Shiksha Mitra in a village in Siwan district, Bihar who forcibly marks himself present everyday in school even when he isn't present. He uses foul language and indulges in abusive behaviour (*gali-galoch karte hain*) and harasses other teachers in school as well. The headmistress reported that this teacher also worked as a lawyer in a local court.

Following on from noting teachers' and children's presence in school, we needed to look at whether there was teaching activity in the school, and we look at this in the next section.

3.3.2 *Levels of teaching activity*

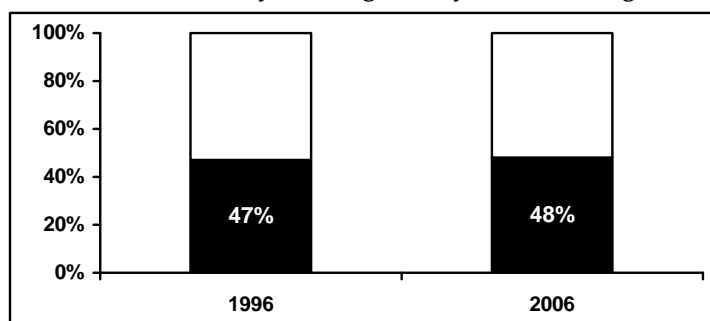
Teachers undoubtedly need a positive environment to teach. Changes since 1996 have contributed to this in terms of better facilities and improved administration. However, we still observed negligence in 2006 similar to that in 1996. Close to half the schools had no teaching activity at the time of the team's unannounced visit --

⁷ Both the 1996 and 2006 surveys measure teacher absenteeism from the point of view of the child's experience. In other words, they capture whether or not the teachers were present on the first day of the survey, regardless of the reason they were missing from school. Teachers are recorded as absent even if they were away on official duty or on earned leave.

⁸ The higher rates of absenteeism among permanent teachers could be indicative of the lack of accountability that a permanent appointment entails.

very similar to what we found in 1996 (see Fig. 3.5). Some teachers were absent, others were found to be sipping tea, knitting, or whiling away time simply chatting.

Fig. 3.5 Schools without any teaching activity when investigators arrived



Source: School surveys: PROBE, 1996; PROBE Revisited, 2006.

One contributory factor to this negligence is the absence of a sufficient role played by head-teachers in the schools surveyed. At the time of the team's unannounced visit, there was no head-teacher in more than half of all schools – in 15 per cent of schools they were away on official work, in 5 per cent of schools they arrived later, in 12 per cent of schools they were officially on leave, and in 20 per cent of schools no head-teacher had been appointed. The importance of a head-teacher and the need for teachers to have a level of accountability within the school has been stressed repeatedly and is also an important point made in a recent study on teachers (see Box – How Teachers' Practice is Influenced by Ground Realities).

Another contributory factor is the persistence of single-teacher schools. In both 1996 and 2006, only one teacher was appointed in 12 per cent of schools.⁹ In 1996, an additional 21 per cent of schools were *functioning* as single-teacher schools on the day of the survey; in 2006, this figure had declined to 14 per cent, reflecting an improvement in teachers' attendance in multi-teacher schools. The proportion of schools that were effectively single-teacher schools had come down – from about one-third to one-quarter over the ten-year period – the proportion still remains unacceptably high.

3.3.3 Teaching methods observed

Over the decade between the two surveys, resources have been poured into improving the classroom experience of enrolled children. In-service training programmes under SSA (and DPEP before that) have been

⁹However, this does not include the same set of schools. Schools with only a single teacher in 1996 have been allocated additional teachers. Some of the new schools set up between 1996 and 2006 have only one teacher appointed.

How Teachers' Practice is Influenced by Ground Realities*

Vimala Ramachandran, Suman Bhattacharjea and K M Sheshagiri

Our objective [in the study] has been to explore the ways in which teachers' practice is shaped by conditions on the ground. The underlying issue relates to why, despite enormous increases in budget outlays and a host of government initiatives, learning outcomes in our primary schools continue to be so poor. Here are some of the key conclusions that emerged from this exploration.

1. Teacher selection and preparation

Despite the plentiful supply of young people ready to train as teachers, there are no mechanisms to select those who show talent for and interest in teaching, or to prepare them to engage with the ground realities of primary school teaching.

... entry-level requirements are very low for primary school teachers...(and) a large number of teachers themselves are unable to grasp primary school content.

In addition, pre-service training programmes assume that teachers will have a homogeneous community of learners, adequate infrastructure and TLM and the luxury of teaching a single class at a time....whereas the ground realities are quite different.

Most importantly, it is hard to think of a more damning indictment of the education system than this single fact: teachers do not even conceive of their work in terms of creating an environment where all children can learn. They continue to teach the way they were taught, in the absence of a space for questioning, analysis and reconstruction.

2. Performance, recognition and rewards

Once teachers are appointed, the education system fails to identify and encourage or reward good teaching practice.

At the same time, multiplicities of factors act as *disincentives* to adopting creative teaching practices.

a. the nature and amount of in-service training they are provided

In-service teacher-training courses are rarely need-based, and are viewed as formalities to be completed rather than as important resources to help teachers do their job better. Training methodologies discourage questioning, discussion and analysis by teachers.

b. the kind of supervision and support they receive

A supervisory system exists which is focused on collection of administrative data and on ensuring that schools and school personnel conform to standards and procedures developed elsewhere...

Despite the fact that BRCs and CRCs were established to provide academic support to teachers, in practice these personnel fulfil routine administrative aspects of school functioning and collect data; they have neither the training nor the experience to provide academic supervision or support. As mentioned earlier, in-service training contributes little towards this.

c. the encouragement/incentives the system offers.

With salaries being related exclusively to seniority, coupled with the automatic promotion policy in many states, there is little for primary school teachers to gain by putting more effort into teaching.

...teachers are not expected to exercise their own judgement in determining how best to teach: Teachers are expected to implement innovations developed at higher levels of the system, regardless of practical constraints.

Further, by assuming that the provision of standardised inputs automatically translates into meaningful classroom experiences, the policies limit teachers' ability to construct their own and their students' knowledge.

In order to promote competence and nurture talent among teachers, the education system needs to prioritise certain aspects and operationalise them throughout the system. This means, for example, that teachers

should be chosen on the basis of aptitude and interest, not only on the basis of marks. Promotions and salary increments should be awarded for effective teaching. Supervision should encourage innovative practices, not punish them. And, training programmes should aim to help teachers think for themselves about what they are doing. Most of all, these different areas of educational policy must be coordinated so that they all push teachers in the same direction, towards better teaching practices.

... But this can only begin to happen if those providing leadership in educational departments and institutions are themselves educators rather than administrators. Teachers are appointed, trained and evaluated on the basis of administrative rather than educational logic. Until this situation changes, learning outcomes are unlikely to improve in our primary schools.

... In other words, the best textbooks in the world will be of limited use in the hands of an incompetent teacher, whereas a talented and sensitive teacher always finds ways to catalyse students' learning even under the most difficult of working conditions.

3. No system of accountability for quality of learning outcomes

An overwhelming message from the ground is that the head teacher, wherever they exist, does not have any administrative powers to shape his/her school, supervise the work of the teachers and take full responsibility for what happens under his/her domain. The head teacher exerts limited authority over teachers, since promotions, transfers and other decisions are taken elsewhere. Supervisory personnel are confined primarily to administrative inspections. Local communities do not have the skills to undertake professional evaluation of teachers. District education authorities often operate on the basis of political or administrative, rather than educational, criteria.

To whom, then, are elementary school teachers accountable for the quality of learning outcomes? The short answer to this question is: nobody.

4. Organisational structure, resources and unity of command

The absence of an integrated vision for educational development can be seen concretely in the absence of linkages, both horizontal and vertical, between different institutions within the education system. ... For example, the SSA and SCERT in-service training programmes, often operate independent of each other, and neither one draws upon the experience of non-government organisations.

The lack of linkages within the system can result in the generation of educational policy based on an idealised vision of the future which has little connection with ground realities. Because implementation is monitored on the basis of quantitative targets rather than educational outcomes, the numerous ways in which such policy fails to be translated into educationally worthwhile practice—and the reasons for this failure—are neither documented nor analysed.

Political interference

The “informal system” of patronage, rent seeking, the everyday dynamics of local politics and vested interests that drive decisions at different levels of the administration came out as the sub-text in almost all conversations with teachers. The community of teachers are both victims and vehicles of a complex dynamic that plays out on the ground.

This system forces teachers to oblige local politicians and elites who control the limited rewards obtainable within the system — in particular, transfers to desired locations. Reform or radical change is called for in order to address this phenomenon boldly and without resorting to the comfort of working within the parameters of the formal system detailed in administrative norms and procedures. The predicament of teachers in India cannot be addressed in any meaningful manner unless and until political interference and rent seeking are seriously addressed.

*This note has been excerpted from Vimala Ramachandran, Suman Bhattacharjea and K M Sheshagiri. 2009. “Primary School Teachers: The Twists And Turns Of Everyday Practice”. To be published by Azim Premji Foundation. The study focuses on five states (Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Kerala, West Bengal and Rajasthan). It is based on the literature available, on the authors' own past professional experience, as well as discussions with teacher educators and administrators at the state and district levels, teachers and teacher union leaders, elected representatives at the village level, researchers, and educationists.

conducted regularly. However, the picture with regard to teaching methods being used is not encouraging. The researchers spent a week in a set of sample villages¹⁰ to get a better idea of classroom processes.

The most commonly used methods to teach children in primary school were making the child recite the alphabet, numbers, and multiplication tables, and asking the child to copy from the blackboard or the textbook. It seemed that the main goal of the teachers was to ensure that the child becomes literate – that is, she is able to identify, read and write alphabets and numbers. Teachers were also observed to read aloud from the textbooks, and explain the text line by line. However, involving the children in activities with music, drawing, dancing and organized play were not observed anywhere. Multi-grade teaching was common, and had consequences for the attention children received (see Box – Multi-grade Teaching Meant One Grade Being Ignored).

Multi-grade Teaching Meant One Grade Being Ignored!

Children of Grades 3 and 4 in the Government Uchh Prathmik Vidyalaya (upper primary school), Rasola* (Jhunjhunu district, Rajasthan) sit in the same classroom and have their classes together. According to the school time table, the Hindi teacher has two periods with this multi-grade class on Monday. However, what was observed in this class was not multi-grade teaching at all.

During the first Hindi period, the teacher only paid attention to the four children of class 4 who recited what the teacher read from the textbook and then copied the key words of the text which the teacher had written on the blackboard. The eight children in class 3 meanwhile were completely ignored, they were doing as they pleased. Some children were writing in their notebooks, some were talking amongst themselves, some were walking in and out of the classroom without the teacher paying any attention to them. It was like a free period for class 3. Conversely, in the other Hindi period of the day, students of class 4 were completely ignored while those in class 3 sat close to the teacher and were being taught. This neglect was in spite of the fact that there were only 12 students in both the grades put together.

If multi-grade teaching is done in this fashion, children are actively taught for only half the time that the teacher is present in their class and teaching.

*The name of the village has been changed.

Class 1 was often the most neglected. "Some of the class 1 students had walked out of school and were running towards the fields, some were near the hand-pump, some were sitting and making a lot of noise (*kaksha 1 ke bachhe kuchh school se nikalkar kheto ki aur bhaag rahe the, kuchh hand pump ke paas the, kuchh baithkar shor macha rahe the*)" were the observations of a researcher. In a village in Bhabua district, Bihar, a researcher noted how there was teaching activity but not for the younger children. "The teacher for classes 1-3 was knitting in the classroom, whereas the teacher for classes 4 and 5 was engaged in active teaching" (*pehli, doosri, teesri ki shikshika kaksha mein baithkar sweater bun rahi thi, aur 4 aur 5 ki shikshika sakriya roop se padha rahi thi*). The neglect of Class 1 children was widely observed during the 2006 Survey.

Even those Class 1 students who were given some attention were taught an incomplete curriculum in a way which was not appropriate to their age. Not only did they not learn about topics like colours, environment, and shapes; the methods in which they were taught centred around rote learning, and lacked imagination and variety. In the case of Class 1 children in the primary school in a village in Siwan district, Bihar, the situation was even worse -- the teacher's role had been taken over by a student. "The class 1 children were being led by a boy from class 3 in repeating [alphabets / words] from their Hindi textbooks (*kaksha 1 ke bachhe apni Hindi ki kitaab nikaal kar ratva laga rahe the. Us kaksha mein teesri kaksha ka ladka, ratva lagva raha tha*)". This lack of

¹⁰This was part of the village studies. See footnote 5.

attention for Class 1 students was in spite of the fact that many teachers of Class 1 spoke about the difficulties faced in teaching such young children for whom the school environment was absolutely new. This strategy of giving less attention to the younger kids also goes with the widespread need for multi-grade teaching. “Teaching” the younger children is then reduced to just minding them while the teacher’s attention is focused on the older children.

One possible consequence of the limited teaching activity in school, and of uninteresting teaching methods used, is that absenteeism amongst children is very high. While dropping out at this stage is low (as seen from the household survey, and discussed in the next chapter), discouragement accumulates, and dropping out takes place during grades 6-8.

3.4 *Private schools*

In this final section on the school environment, we look at private schooling facilities in the sample villages, and how they have changed between 1996 and 2006.

3.4.1 *Massive growth in the availability of private schools*

Thousands of private schools have sprung up across rural India in every state in the last decade. In 1996, around one in five villages (21%) we surveyed had a private school; by 2006, this proportion had gone up to one in three villages (34%) (see Table 3.6). In both 1996 and 2006, two-thirds of the villages with private schools had only one private school, but one-third had more than one, indicating that in this latter group of villages, private schools are themselves offering a choice.

Table 3.6 Private school availability: 1996 and 2006

	1996	2006
Proportion (%) of villages with a private school	21 (6)	34 (11)
Number of private schools	41	97

Note: Figures in parenthesis give the proportion of villages with more than one private school.

Source: School surveys: PROBE, 1996; PROBE Revisited, 2006.

Close to 70 per cent of the private schools surveyed in 2006 had been set up in the past decade, i.e. between 1997 and 2006. This is most visible in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan where 41 out of 45 private schools in the villages surveyed in 2006 had been started between 1996 and 2006. The rapid growth of private schools continues in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as well.

The 2006 Survey revealed a big jump in the proportion of private schools that were “recognized” by the government – from 37 per cent in 1996 to 68 per cent¹¹ in 2006, indicating an easing of recognition norms. Recognition was aspired to by most promoters, mainly because it made schools more attractive to parents; facilitated the process of schools upgrading to the next level; and made it possible for schools to give children Transfer Certificates (when they wanted to leave and join other schools). In terms of financial support from the government, only 2 private schools in the 2006 Survey were aided by the government; and these schools did not charge fees.

The 2006 Survey found that the vast majority of teachers in the private schools were young men with some education. The growth in private schools appears to have been facilitated by the fact that there are educated young men in the villages who are willing to work as teachers at low rates. However, owners of private schools were still struggling to run their small businesses successfully (see Box).

¹¹This included 5 per cent of schools which had partial recognition.

Costs of Opening a Private School

Neelam Kumari* runs a newly recognised private school in Phursania,* Farukhabad district, Uttar Pradesh. Her husband is a school teacher at a nearby secondary school. She had been lucky enough to get massive support from the villagers. It had not been difficult to get government recognition for her school, although there was a lot of paperwork preparing the files and registers required by the government.

Neelam reported that at least Rs.100,000-200,000, if not more, were required as an initial investment to establish a private school. This money covered basic infrastructural costs such as construction of class rooms and purchase of essential furniture.

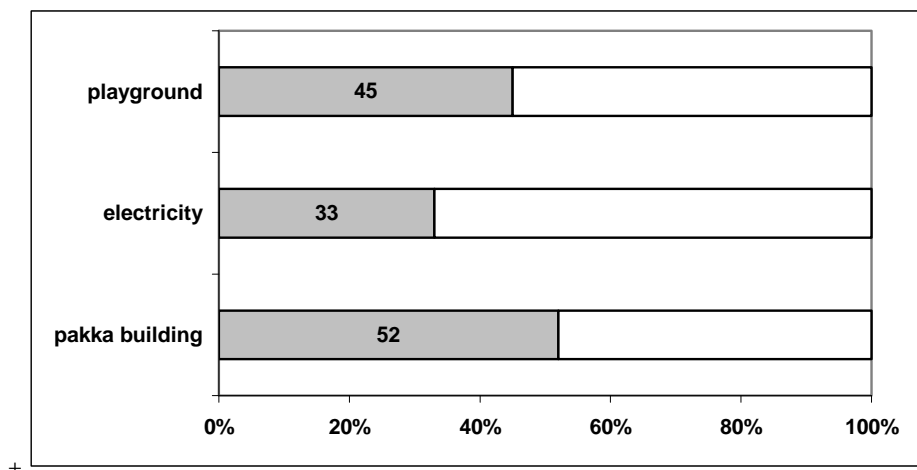
Neelam also said that money and infrastructure alone were not enough – an important point not often grasped by government. You needed good well-trained people to operate a school. Teachers had to be paid - and paid quite well. Otherwise no qualified teacher would stay at the school for long.

*The names of the person and the village have been changed for confidentiality.

3.4.2 Heterogeneity of private schools

The private school sector is marked by heterogeneity. Even the infrastructure is quite varied, although private schools invest as much as possible to attract parents and children, and to meet requirements for recognition. Only half the schools surveyed had a fully pakka building (see Fig. 3.7); close to one-tenth were functioning in kaccha structures.

Fig. 3.7 Infrastructure in private schools, 2006



Notes: 1. Figures give the proportion of private schools with the specified facilities.

2. Of the 48% of schools which do not have a pakka building, 39% have a partly pakka building, and 9% have a kaccha building or no building.

Source: School survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

In many villages, private schools were initially set up to cater to very young children. But the situation appears to have changed. In the 2006 Survey, we found that only 9 per cent of schools were not primary schools. That is, they did not go up to class 5. The largest group (44%) included those which offered upper-

primary schooling at most (up to class 8) (see Table 3.8). Secondary schools (which went up to class 10) were relatively few in number. These constituted only 16 per cent of schools.

Table 3.8 Heterogeneity of private schools at primary level

Highest grade in school	Proportion (%) of schools	Numbers enrolled in primary classes	Annual fees in Class 1 (Rs)	Annual fees in Class 5 (Rs)
Class 5/6/7	30	97	576	703
Class 8	44	126	504	546
Class 10	16	141	807	1132

Note. Nine of the 97 private schools had negligible enrolment in primary grades and did not go up to class 5.

Source: School survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

The size of schools at primary stage varied – in grades 1 to 5, primary schools had 97 enrolled, middle schools 126, and secondary schools 141, an indication of the greatest popularity of secondary schools, followed by middle schools, and lastly primary schools. The relative importance of the primary section in terms of enrolment was somewhat similar in the middle and secondary schools. The fees charged at primary level were highest in the secondary schools (Rs 807 in class 1 and Rs 1132 in class 5). Fees charged in the primary and middle schools were closer to each other. Some outliers pushed the average for primary schools beyond the average for middle schools. The fees charged are some indication that the quality of schooling is superior in the secondary schools, and somewhat similar in the middle and primary schools.

A distinctive feature of private schools – not found in government schools – is the existence of pre-primary classes. Close to 70 per cent of the schools had pre-primary enrolment and the average enrolment at this level was around 50 children (in the primary, middle and secondary schools). Pre-primary education was one of the factors which drew parents to private schools.

Teachers in private schools felt that the main reason for the popularity of private schools was that parents wanted regular teaching activity for their children, and were dissatisfied with the functioning of government schools in their village. Parents generally agreed with this perception, but they also reported frustration with the functioning of private schools (see Chapter 4). Learning English was not reported as the main driver for the growth of private schools in these villages. While English was a subject, we found that 75 per cent of private schools in the 2006 Survey were Hindi-medium, 20 per cent were both Hindi-and-English medium, and only 5 per cent were English-medium. There will be more discussion on school choice in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The 2006 Survey indicates that there has been considerable expansion of the government schooling system. The 1996 Survey had highlighted that access was still a problem, particularly in remote areas and for disadvantaged communities. The setting up of new government schools meets this need.

The government has moved towards decentralizing education management, and required that its schools set up education committees. These organizations have been given responsibility to improve infrastructure, implement incentive schemes, and appoint and monitor teachers. However, there remains a question mark as to how well these organizations are functioning in the surveyed states, particularly in terms of being representative of the parent community.

Physical infrastructure in government schools has greatly improved. More schools in 2006 had at least two all-weather rooms and more schools had access to drinking water and toilets. A number of incentive schemes are in place to attract students to school. The most successful appears to have been the introduction of the cooked midday meal scheme. Provision of free textbooks to all students has also been an important change.

Over the ten years, 1996 to 2006, there has been a massive recruitment of teachers, but Pupil Teacher Ratios have not changed and neither has the proportion of schools (12%) which have only a single teacher appointed. Local teachers were widely recruited, on contract and for a fraction of what permanent teachers are paid. The proportion of permanent teachers is now just over half of all teachers. The recruitment of contract teachers has meant that the average teacher is younger, more likely to be female than earlier, and a local resident. The majority of teachers continue to come from the more powerful caste groups in rural areas ("general castes" and OBCs). While educational levels are not very different, the proportion of teachers with pre-service training has dropped between 1996 and 2006.

The functioning of government schools is still far from adequate. Head-teachers play a limited role – not appointed in 20 per cent of schools, and missing from school in another 32 per cent of schools (at the time of the team's unannounced visit). There has been little change in proportions of teachers present in school -- about four-fifths were present in 2006 (also when the team visited unannounced), as in 1996. In addition, not all teachers present were teaching. The most dismal finding of the 2006 Survey was that close to half of all schools did not have a single teacher teaching (at the time of the unannounced visit). This was similar to what was found in the 1996 Survey.

There was also little change in the types of teaching activity taking place: copying from the board or the textbook, reciting aloud in a chorus: number from 1 to 100, the alphabet, multiplication tables. Rote learning was emphasised. Multi-grade teaching was common. Class 1 was generally neglected. Within a class, attention was paid only to some. The attendance register indicated that on average close to two-thirds of enrolled children were coming to school. Although reliability of attendance data has improved, observed attendance was still below what the attendance register indicated.

Private schools are available in far more villages in 2006 than they were in 1996, and they appear to be flourishing. Their infrastructure, however, remains quite poor. Their enrolment and the grades offered also vary considerably. The bulk are upper primary schools indicating that such schools are more in demand and that private providers are able to make the investments required to attract parents and their children to these schools. The expansion of the private schooling system reflects the fact that there are increasing numbers of parents paying for their children's schooling.

While we must acknowledge the massive efforts launched under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, we find that educational outcomes still fall short of desired levels. Ensuring good quality education to children continues to remain a challenge.

Chapter 4

THE FAMILY *of the* PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD

F*amily attitudes*, household wealth and other socio-economic characteristics are important drivers of children's educational outcomes. They provide the context within which educational opportunities are negotiated and the outcomes achieved. Wealthy households typically have more educational options available to their children compared to poorer households. The pressure of work is greater on the latter. Family and community attitudes to women and their role in society influence the opportunities made available to girl children. Cultural traditions around marriage and mobility shape the amount of education accessed by girls and boys. In this chapter, we look at family attitudes to schooling and how they have shifted since 1996. We evaluate how families choose between different schools, and the influences of supply, price, quality, gender and community on their choices. Finally, we look at the role the social, economic and policy dynamics plays in parents' decision to send their children to school or not.

4.1 *Parents' keenness for education*

4.1.1 *Enrolment a social norm*

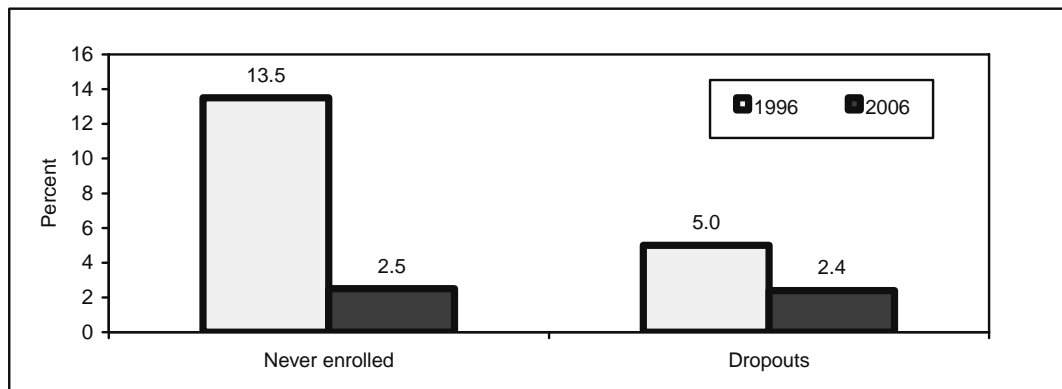
In 1996, at the time of the PROBE Survey, parents had spoken overwhelmingly of their keenness for education. Nearly all parents (98%) said they considered education important for their sons, while a somewhat lower but still very large proportion (89%) said they considered education important for their daughters. This keenness for education was a very significant finding in the context of the commonly-held view at the time that the main reason for children being out of school was parents' lack of interest in education. However, in spite of the high motivation for education expressed by parents in 1996, the PROBE Survey found from household interviews that 14 per cent of the 6-12 age group had never been enrolled.

Considerable changes have taken place in the school environment in the ten years between the two surveys, which we have discussed at length in the previous chapter. These changes have occurred in the context of changes in the wider economy with improvements in connectivity of urban and rural areas, growth in the relative importance of the non-agricultural sector,¹ and a rise in real per capita incomes for a proportion of the

¹The Economic Survey, 2009-10 shows that in the 10 years between the PROBE Survey and the PROBE Revisited Survey, the contribution of the primary sector to GDP at factor cost declined from 29 per cent (1995-96) to 22 per cent (2005-06).

rural population. Together, these changes have contributed to schooling among the 6-12 year-olds being much more widespread than it was in 1996.

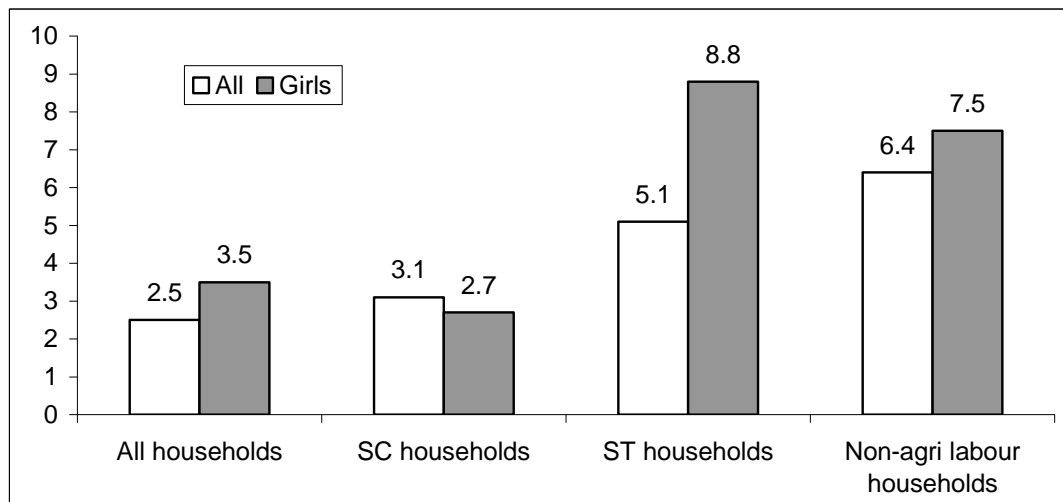
Fig. 4.1 Decline in proportions out of school, 1996-2006
(6-12 age group)



Source: Household surveys: PROBE, 1996; PROBE Revisited, 2006.

Most significantly, between 1996 and 2006 there has been a huge drop in the proportion of children never enrolled in school. Fig. 4.1 plots the proportions of never-enrolled children and dropouts in the 6-12 age group in 1996 and 2006, based on the PROBE and the PROBE Revisited household surveys, respectively. The proportion of never-enrolled declined from 13.5 per cent in 1996 to just 2.5 per cent in 2006. Much of this decline was due to the rapid increase in enrolment of girls. The proportion that had dropped out of school in this age group was already low in 1996, but it was still lower (2.4%) in 2006.

Fig. 4.2 Comparing proportions never-enrolled across social groups, 2006
(6-12 age group)



Source: Household survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006

Fig. 4.2 plots the proportion of never-enrolled children in the 6-12 age group in 2006 among disadvantaged groups – SC children, tribal children, and children of non-agricultural labourers. While the overall proportion of children never enrolled is 2.5 per cent, the proportions never-enrolled among the socially disadvantaged groups are higher (3.1 per cent among children from SC families and 5.1 per cent among children from ST families). Lower motivation for educating girls is reflected in the fact that a higher proportion (3.5%) had never been enrolled. The difference is particularly stark among tribals – 8.8 per cent of girls have never been

enrolled. In terms of looking at variations in enrolment patterns by parents' occupations, a relatively high proportion (6.4%) of children from families engaged in non-agricultural labour has not been enrolled in school. Many of these families belonged to the socially disadvantaged SC / ST groups. The variations in proportions never enrolled indicate that while gaps between privileged and less privileged groups have narrowed, they still exist. The reasons reported for not enrolling the child were related to the family's inability to bear the costs of education (especially in the case of girls): they couldn't cover the cash costs and /or there was a need for the child to be engaged in other activities (see Box – Non-enrolment and Non-attendance in Narda). There were some households where the child had not been enrolled because of disability and/or illness.

Non-enrolment and Non-attendance in Narda

In Narda* village in Banka district, Bihar, many parents reported little or no interest in schooling which manifested itself in them enrolling their children nominally, if at all. The most common reason for this was the reality of day-to-day survival. Many households in this region were landless and lived in extreme poverty. Able-bodied adults in these families often migrated to other states looking for work, leaving the old and the children behind. In these instances the responsibility for caring for the livestock and the old fell on the children. Other families took their children with them disrupting any chance of continuity in their child's education. Local private tutor Usha Kumari* informed researchers that during harvesting all the children had to work in the fields with their parents.

In Narda earning a livelihood was the priority for many families and schooling was not seen as a way to enhance earnings. Parents were dismissive of the benefits of education and felt it was largely irrelevant to their lives. For example, when the researchers asked Kusha Devi from the Dhobi community where she sent her children to study she replied, "Nowhere... we have to earn a living...what do we have to do with education? (*hamein apna khaana kamaana hai...hamein padhai se kya matlab?*)". For these households, the opportunity cost of sending a child to school was high, and perceptions of benefits of schooling were low.

*Names have been changed.

The net result of the fall in the proportions of never-enrolled children and those who have dropped out of school is that the proportion of currently enrolled among the 6-12 age group is now close to universal. The figure rose from 80 per cent in 1996 to 95 per cent in 2006. In the 2006 Survey, the proportion of girls currently enrolled (94%) does not lag far behind the proportion for boys (96%), whereas in 1996, there was a large differential (87 per cent of boys were enrolled compared to just 70 per cent of girls). Enrolment rates have also shot up among dalits and tribals – proportions currently enrolled in the 6-12 age group were 94 per cent and 89 per cent, respectively in 2006 compared to 73 per cent (combined for both groups) in 1996.

The upsurge in enrolment is linked to the concerted efforts under DPEP earlier, and more recently under SSA, to bring all children into school. The setting up of new schools in remote areas and in unserved hamlets, enrolment drives (School Chalo Abhiyan) at the beginning of each school year, the improvements in school infrastructure and facilities, and the increase in number and coverage of incentives, particularly the close to universal implementation of the cooked midday meal scheme are among the many policies which have contributed to this upsurge in enrolment. One young man from Rajasthan spoke of the benefits of incentives for educating girls: "If a girl goes to school, she gets benefits from the government (*[ladki padegi to] suvidhaaen sarkaar dwaara mil ajati hain*)". We discuss perceptions of future benefits of schooling in the next section.

4.1.2 Gendered motivation and aspirations for education persist

Parents in 2006 were quite articulate about the need for education for their sons and daughters. However, gendered motivations and aspirations persist. As in 1996, motivation for education of boys was very strong and closely tied to improved income and employment opportunities (see Box -- Parents' Aspirations for Sons).

Parents' Aspirations for Sons

Families which had little education saw the role of education as empowering for their son to handle routine tasks such as sign his name or read a letter or find his way around.

"...he will not have to put his thumb impression", said an uneducated labourer in MP.

"He will be able to read the number of a bus when he goes out...if a letter comes, he can read it", said a 40 year-old, uneducated tribal woman from UP.

"...will be able to purchase a ticket... he will have no problem in travelling (...*ticket le sakte hain...safar karne mein koi dikkat nahi*)", said a 35-year-old daily wage labourer in UP who belonged to the nai caste.

Such families hoped that education would give their boy a chance to escape from doing daily wage labour.

"If he studies, he won't have to do daily wage labour... he can get a small job or do some work somewhere. He can read and understand for himself...he won't have to ask others (*padega to mazdoori nahi karni padegi...chhoti moti naukri ya to kaam kar sakta hai kahin par. Khud pad kar samajh sakta hai...doosron se poochhna na pade*)", said a young illiterate mother from Rajasthan.

There was hope that education would enable the boy to be a better farmer.

A very poor but educated man from Rajasthan said:

"... want to educate them so they can get information on all matters, can keep accounts, and get information on chemicals and seeds used for farming (...*padhana chhate hain taki unko sabhi jaankari mil sake, ve hisaab kitaab kar sake, kheti ke liye dawaiyon beejon ki jankari mil sake*)".

But families also saw education as offering the opportunity to get away from farming.

"We are uneducated. At the very least, our boys should study... so that they do not have to face the difficulties of farming (*hum to anpad hai... kam se kam hamaare bachchhe to pad le...taaki vo bhi kheti mein pareshaan na ho*)", said a 40 year-old dalit farmer from UP, who is uneducated and very poor.

A 45 year-old tribal farmer from Rajasthan was clear that there was need to look for employment outside farming.

"In today's times, a boy will have to study. The whole family will not be able to survive on farming (*aa ke samay mein to ladke ko padhna hi padega. Poore parivar ke kharche kheti ke bharse nahi chal sakte hain*)".

Parents hoped that education would give their son more independence, more social status, a chance for him to live a new life, take himself and his family out of the cycle of poverty, and become part of modern India.

"...he will become clever...the government will give him some attention...he won't be like us (...*hoshiyaar ban jayega, sarkaar uspar dhyaan degi...hum logon ki tarah to nahi rahenge*)", was the hope of a 37 year-old uneducated OBC farmer-cum-sharecropper from Bihar.

"...he can become a great man... like Madhu Koda who is from here and has now become the Chief Minister (...*bada aadmi banega...jaise Madhu Koda yaheen ka hain aur abhi mukhyamantri bana*)", said an uneducated OBC farmer from Jharkhand.

"...his life will be happy...he will be able to educate his own family (...*jeevan sukhi ho jaayega, apne parivaar ko shikshit rakh sakega*)", said a 47 year-old OBC uneducated agricultural labourer from UP.

"...he will be sensible...not drink or gamble (...*samajhdaar honge..sharaab jua nahi karenge*)", said an OBC farmer from MP who has passed Class 12.

"...he can roam around in a nice big car (...*achchi badi gaadi mein ghoom sake*)", said a 45 year-old uneducated ST woman from a very poor household in Rajasthan.

These hopes can be summed up in a quote by a 39-year-old educated farmer from Uttarakhand:

"In the present times, education is essential, to make a living, to have respect in society, and to be joined with those who are making progress (*varmaan samay mein apni rozi roti, samaajik pratishtha, vikaas ki dhaara mein judne ke liye shiksha zaroori hai*)".

Education employment linkages were less important for girls than for boys in the 2006 Survey, too. Just 40 per cent of parents reportedly valued education for improving a girl's employment potential. However, this was still higher than other benefits of education which were cited. And parents were recognising that there were new employment opportunities for girls: see Box – Parents' Perceptions on Education Employment Linkages for Girls.

Parents' Perceptions on Education Employment Linkages for Girls

New employment opportunities for girls were recognised by parents in the 2006 Survey.

An uneducated truck-driver in UP said: "...she can become a chief in the village... (*...pradhaan ban sakti hai...*)".

"It is necessary to get girls educated because this is the age of reservation (*ladki ki shiksha bahut zaroori hai kyonki yeh aarakshan ka zamaana hai*)", said a Rajput man from Sultanpur, UP, a graduate who works in a university.

Education was valued because it gives a girl a chance to stand on her own feet.

"...if her husband is uneducated she can look after her family and teach her children (*...pati anpad mil jaaye to parivaar ko lekar chal sake aur apne bachhon ko pada likha sake*)", said a 50 year-old OBC father from MP who works as daily wage labour.

"If her husband leaves her, she will be able to earn and feed herself (*kabhi unka admi agar chhod de, to vo apna kama-kha sakegi*)", said an uneducated 35 year-old OBC woman from MP.

"...if the need arises she can take up a job... (*...zaroorat padne par naukri vagarah kar sake...*)".
"an educated girl is not dependent on anyone...otherwise she may be burnt alive by her in-laws (*padhi likhi ladki kisi par ashrit nahi rahti...nahi to sasural mein jala di sakti hai*)", said a 40 year-old woman, from Sant Ravidas Nagar in UP, who had completed secondary schooling.

Said a 32 year-old uneducated OBC woman who was widowed three years ago and does casual labour: "I have become a widow... If I were educated I would have been able to do something. (*jaise hum vidhva ho gaye... agar padhe likhe hote to kuchh kar sakte the*)".

Improvement in marriage prospects continues to be an important reason for educating girls. Parents felt strongly that educated girls can get married more easily and into more respectable and more modern families. Many also linked education to increasing a woman's ability to guide her children and look after the family. This was an important motivational factor for parents and was closely linked to a girl's primary responsibility as a home-maker. A 32 year-old Muslim woman from UP who has completed class 12 herself talks of how schooling has made a difference to her ability to run her house: "...because we were poor my parents got me married to an uneducated person. I am educated so I am able to manage my household carefully (*...mere ma-baap ne gareeb rahene ke kaaran hamein ek anpad ke saath shaadi kar diye. Padi-likhi hoon to hisaab se ghar chala paati hoon*)".

There were several interesting responses which spoke of how education brought girls self-confidence, and taught them how to live in a modern world (see Box -- Parents: "Education to Enable Girls to Live in a Modern World"). It earned them respect from society -- "If a girl is educated, she will get more respect (*padhne-likhne se samaaj mein ladki ki izzat badhegi*)", said a 35 year-old educated *nai* (SC) agricultural labourer.

Parents: “Education To Enable Girls to Live in a Modern World”

Parents were linking education with making a woman more self-confident and functioning in a modern world:

“...can take a decision at any level... (*...kisi bhi sthar par nirnay le sake...*)”, said a 50 year-old OBC wage labourer from MP.

“...nobody will take twenty rupees from her when she owes ten (*...koi us se dus rupay ke badle bees rupay nahi lega*)”, said a 30 year-old uneducated OBC woman from Bihar.

“Uneducated girls cannot even go anywhere (*anpadh ladki kahin ja bhi nahi sakti hai*)”, said a 36 year-old agricultural labourer in Uttarakhand who has been to school.

Parents expect that schooling will teach girls more modern ways of how to talk and how to live.

“If a girl is educated, she will learn the way to live, speak...because education will light up the way (*padh-likh jaaye to usey rahen-sahen baat-cheet ka tarika aayega...kyonki shiksha prakaash hai*)”, said an OBC farmer from MP who has completed class 12.

“If a girl is educated she will be well-informed ...she can use a gas stove (*padhegi to jaankaari rahegi...gas jalaana seekh jayegi*)”, said another man from MP who has passed class 12.

Closely related to differences in motivation for education of sons and daughters, were differences in parents’ aspirations for how far they wanted to educate their boys and girls. Parents’ aspirations regarding the extent of education for their sons were already high even at the time of the 1996 Survey, and they have remained high. In the 2006 Survey, the majority of parents wanted their sons to study up to grade 12 and beyond, some adding “unless the boy is unable to”. The big change has been that parents’ aspirations for their girls have increased considerably in the decade between the two surveys (see Table 4.3). In 2006, 52 per cent of parents interviewed said that they would like their daughter to study “as far as possible” or “as long as she is capable”, compared to 28 per cent in 1996. These changing norms are also reflected in the steep decline in the proportion of parents who had very low aspirations for their daughters. The proportion of parents who wanted their daughter to study “up to class 8 at most” dropped from 37 per cent in 1996 to 20 per cent in 2006.

Table 4.3 Changing aspirations for girls, 1996-2006

Proportion (%) of parents who wanted their daughters to study up to:	1996	2006
Grade 5 or less	19	6
Grade 8	18	14
Grade 10	20	14
Grade 12 or more	15	14
As long as the child is capable	28	42
As far as possible		10
	100	100

Note: The girls were in the 6-12 age group and enrolled in school.

Source: Household surveys: PROBE 1996; PROBE Revisited, 2006.

The demand for education has grown even among poor and socially disadvantaged groups coupled with rising aspirations to educate girls “as long as the child is capable”. In the next section we discuss parental choice, in the context of variations in supply, quality, and price of schooling.

4.2 Choice of Schools

In 1996, the government provision for schools had already started expanding rapidly and there were considerable variations within it – regular primary schools and a variety of alternate schools. The private school sector was growing, but it was relatively small and unstable – very few schools went beyond the primary level. Parents’ choice was somewhat limited. The situation has changed considerably, as we discussed in chapter 3. In this section, we discuss school choice for parents in the context of this significant change in the provision of schools.

4.2.1 *Majority are still enrolled in government schools*

In spite of the rapid expansion in the number of private schools set up in the decade between the two surveys, and with it an increase in private school enrolment, the 2006 Survey found that government schools accounted for 79 per cent of all children enrolled in the 6-12 age group (see Table 4.4). This is similar to the situation in 1996, when the corresponding figure was 82 per cent. While the absolute numbers of children enrolled in both government and private schools have grown enormously, the relative size of the two sectors is roughly the same.

The discourse commonly heard during the village studies² was that government schools are “bad” and meant for low-caste and poor children only. The 2006 Survey did find that among enrolled SC and ST children in the 6-12 age group, over 90 per cent are in government schools. However, the government sector was also found to cater for the majority of enrolled children in the 6-12 age group from “general caste” families (67%) and OBC families (77%), both dominant caste groups in rural India.

Table 4.4 Government and private school enrolment, 2006
(6-12 age group)

	Proportion (%) of school-going children enrolled in	
	government school	private school
All children	79	21
Scheduled Castes (SC)	91	9
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	93	7
Other Backward Classes (OBC)	77	23
“General castes”	67	33
Girls	82	18
Boys	76	24

Source: Household survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

While the figures do indicate the dominance of the government sector, the village study in a surveyed village in Hardwar, Uttarakhand provides evidence of the perception that government schools are “bad” and meant for low-caste and poor children. In Meenapur, the Rorrd Rajputs and the Sainis are both prosperous landowning communities. The Scheduled Caste households are very poor, landless and earn their livelihood by doing casual labour. The children from these communities go to different schools. The majority of the children from Rajput and Saini families are enrolled in private schools, whereas the children from the Scheduled Castes go to the village government school. The Panch’s husband, Shyambeer reports: “No studies happen in the primary school in the village. The poor and the children of the Harijan community go to the government school. The headmaster just sits on a chair (*primary mein gaon ke school mein padhai nahi hoti hai. garib aur harijan ke bachche sarkaari mein jaate hain. headmaster kursi par baitha rahta hai*)”.

²These were undertaken in 2007 in 5 villages selected from among the villages covered in the 2006 Survey.

Shyambeer's poor opinion of the quality of education offered at the local government school has led him to send his three sons to schools outside.³ The village study in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan provides further evidence of the role that being part of a specific caste plays in determining school choice (see Box -- Schooling Choice for Parents in Rasola).

Enrolment patterns as shown in Table 4.4 indicate that parents make distinctions between boys and girls when choosing schools. A higher proportion of girls (82%) were in government schools compared to boys (76%). That more boys than girls attend private schools is consistent with the greater parental motivation to invest in boys' education in Indian society. The village studies also found evidence of gender bias in families' choice of schools for their children. Investigators met families who had enrolled the girls in the local government school and the boys in a private school. We give two examples below.

- Bansilal from Sumeri village (Dewas district, Madhya Pradesh) candidly told researchers that he had enrolled his son in a private school so that he could get access to good education, while for his daughters it did not really matter. He had enrolled them in the local government school. Alka had left school after completing class 8. It was expected that the second daughter Chetna would do likewise. Bansilal's attitude to his son's education was quite different. His plan was that the son, after completing Class 10, would travel to the regional centre in Dewas for further study.
- Rajpal explained his choices in terms of the comparative needs of the children. Rajpal sends his daughter to the regular government school in Rasola (Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan) and his son, who has less aptitude for study, to the more established private school: "The cost of private schooling is more, but what to do...the child is not clever... the child says that he will only go to a private school (*beta thoda kamzor hain. Private mein kharcha toh jyada lagta hain. Par kya kare...bachcha tez nahi hain.. bachcha bolta hai ki private mein hi jaunga*)".

We conclude this section on the note that although the vast majority of 6-12 year old children are enrolled in government schools, there is little reason for the education authorities to be complacent. Some parents who can be choosing the private option, and particularly for their sons. Although the availability of private schools has increased greatly, only one-third of villages had a private school and only half of these were recognised, as described in Chapter 3. So parents who wanted to send their child to a private school, may have had to send them out of the village, with implications for cost and security. Among those parents who choose not to exit the government system for their child, it did not mean that the child regularly attended school, was being taught, or was learning. In the next section, we discuss parents' complaints about the lack of teaching in government schools.

4.2.2 Not satisfied with teaching in government schools

On the whole, parents with children in government schools were not very positive about the quality of their child's school. But before we come to parents' complaints, we mention the moderate proportion of parents who expressed satisfaction with the facilities and the teaching in the government school their child was attending. Among them were several parents whose children attend the school in Kapasiya in Rohtas district, Bihar.

- "One girl has studied very well and has gone to middle school...the younger one is handicapped...she is also being taught very well (*ek bachchi badhiya se padhkar middle school chali gayi...doosri ladki viklang hai...usey bhi bahut achchhe dhang se padhaaya jaata hai...*)". (Srimati Devi, an OBC woman)
- "Although we cannot teach the child at home, the masters at school teach the children well (*ham ghar par bachche ko padha nahi sakte, magar school mein mastarji log bahut achchhe tarah se padhaate hain*)". (Bhudan Singh, an uneducated OBC man)

³ Interestingly, he has not given up on the government system altogether. While his two younger sons, Amit (11) and Lalit (8) attend a private school in a neighbouring village, his eldest son Sumit (13) is in class 7 in a government school in the neighbouring town of Roorkee.

- The teachers “teach well, they even bring the child’s report card to the house and also ask us for feedback (*achchhe padhaate hain aur ghar aake bachchon ki shiksha ka report lete aur dete hain*)”. (Mahendra Rajak, an educated SC farmer)

More common were parents who complained about the lack of teaching, and this goes with our observations discussed in the previous chapter: at the time of the survey team’s unannounced visit to the school, there was no head-teacher in more than half of all schools, and there was not a single teacher teaching in close to half of all schools. Here is a sample of parents’ complaints – one from each state.

- “The masters do not come on time... the headmaster is mostly absent. And they do not even teach...they sit around and close the school down earlier than scheduled (*mastar samay par aatey hi nahi hain...pradhan adhyaapak aksar hi gaayab rahte hain. Aur padhai bhi nahi karaate hain...baithe rahte hain aur samay se pahle chhuti de dete hain*)”. (Ajay Kumar, an educated OBC farmer from Saharsa district, Bihar)
- “Teachers do not come regularly and do not pay attention to teaching the children ([teacher] *niyamit roop se nahi aate, bachchon ki padhai par dhyaan nahi dete*)”. (Ram Singh, an uneducated ST farmer from Sikar district in Rajasthan)
- “The teacher only marks the attendance. He does not teach, does not give home work. If the child passes, he takes 5 rupees (*keval hazri daal dete hain. Na padhaate hain, na grihkarya dete hain. Pass hone par 5 rupay lete hain*)”. (An OBC farmer from a village in Damoh district in Madhya Pradesh). A student from the same village confirmed these perceptions: “Sir has never taught us anything... we take the buffaloes to graze, we don’t study. Sir doesn’t teach...he falls asleep (*sir ne kabhi kuchh padhaaya nahi hai...hum bhains charaate hain, hum padhte nahi hain. Sir padhaate nahi hain, neend aati hai sir ko*)”.
- The teacher “does not teach anything, drinks, sometimes even sends the children to get him liquor... (*padhaate kuchh nahi, daaru peete hain; kabhi kabhi bacchon se bhi mangva lete hain*)”. (Ram Lakhan, an uneducated ST non-agricultural labourer from Allahabad district, Uttar Pradesh).

Parents’ complaints of teachers drinking during school hours were confined to male teachers, while female teachers were accused of knitting in class.

While over 90 per cent of children from SC and ST families were enrolled in government schools, they were not necessarily happy with the experience. Neglect of children from lower-caste groups in government schools is one reason for parents from these groups enrolling one or more of their children in private schools if they can afford it. This was also possible because the fees in some private schools were as low as Rs 30/ per month.

Schooling Choice for Parents in Rasola

As private schools are established in villages and towns, parents find themselves faced with a choice about the school to which to send their child. This village study highlights certain key determinants of schooling choice: supply; cost and quality; gender, caste and class considerations.

Supply:

In Rasola* village in Jhunjhunu district, Rajasthan, only one government school was operating until 1986 when the schooling choice available to parents suddenly expanded with the introduction of a second government school, which is now known as the Sanskrit school, while the former is called the Hindi school. In 1996, a private school, JK Public, was set up. In 2005 the opening of the Jawahar school added yet another choice. The government schools are under different managements. Government Upper Primary School Hindi (GUPS Hindi) is a regular upper primary school managed by the State Education Department. The Government Upper Primary School Sanskrit (GUPS Sanskrit) is funded and managed separately by the Department of Sanskrit Education, with the aim to promote Sanskrit language and culture, traditionally associated with the upper-caste Brahman community. The cultural objective of the school fundamentally sets it apart from GUPS Hindi and the two private schools. Differences between the two private schools are also marked by significant differences in size, infrastructure, location and cost. Parents are negotiating this expanded school market and there has been a clear realignment in enrolment numbers with an overwhelming shift away from GUPS Hindi, with many children being enrolled in the Sanskrit school and JK Public. Parents are also making good use of the Jawahar school which opened in 2005. The overwhelming popularity of the private schools in Rasola suggests that education is a good business option in Rasola.

Cost and quality of schools:

Private schools of course cost the household much more than government schools, with annual fees in JK Public as high as Rs 2000, and in Jawahar ranging from Rs 800, for Nursery to class 3, to Rs 1200 for classes 4-5. Some parents felt the extra cost was justified for the quality of education they believed they were purchasing for their children.

Gender, caste and class considerations:

Girls were more likely to be enrolled in the two government schools, and the high costs of private schooling would have contributed to this. For parents, the choice of a particular school is also strongly influenced by the choices of other parents in their social group. Children from Swami, Brahmin and wealthy Rajput families form the majority of students in the two private schools, and children of Harijan households are primarily in the two government schools. A sizeable proportion of Brahman students were also enrolled in the better managed and better funded GUPS Sanskrit school. This was because GUPS Sanskrit is known to put more stress on Sanskrit in their curriculum. Sanskrit is taught from Class 1 onwards, along with Hindi and English.

Parents' use of "voice" and "exit"

The Rasola village study shows that parents took a thoughtful approach to choosing a school for their child. They regularly assessed their choices – especially when there was some change in quality, cost or supply of schools. In the context of change, some families had more mobility than others and some were more able than others to advocate for improvements or change.

In a recent paper on public and private provisioning of education in India, Shailaja Fennell (2007) adopts the concepts of 'exit' and 'voice' to evaluate the relationship between consumer behaviour and the quality of educational provision. The idea of 'exit' captures the capacity of households to freely move between various educational options and embodies the orthodox economic notions of utility maximization, consumer sovereignty, and free entry. The concept of 'voice' seeks to capture the agency of an individual or community to secure the provision of a particular quality of educational service.

In Rasola, the dynamics of exit and voice, and how they structure parental choice, work together to produce a highly differentiated school market. Since 1986 GUPS Hindi has faced growing competition for student enrolment and twenty years later has become a school in which households with no voice and no exit strategy have become trapped. In spite of the high regard in which GUPS Hindi was once held, the community has been unable to resist the decline in the quality of schooling there. Some respondents claim that the villagers don't act in unity to put pressure on the school to improve, but others say the politics is too complicated and that even when villagers took action a few years ago, and registered a complaint against the headmaster there was no response by the authorities (see Box 1). Those that could, left GUPS Hindi and enrolled in other schools.

Box 1: No voice, yes exit

In Rasola it was reported that in 2003 a group of Swami parents and a group of wealthier Rajput parents, tired of paying high fees at the private school and not happy with the quality of teachers and teaching, held a meeting and decided to withdraw their children from the private school and enrol them in GUPS Hindi. The parents felt that the teachers were not good and had complained to the relevant authorities, expecting them to be transferred. Infrastructure did improve somewhat – new fans and electricity were provided – but no teachers were transferred. Eventually the parents got tired of waiting and, again, withdrew their children and readmitted them in the private school. In the words of one of the parents involved,

"One year has been wasted for our children...a dispute came up...nobody supported us....there was no improvement in the staff....we readmitted [the children] in the private school (*hamaare bachchon ka ek saal barbaad ho gaya.. rosh paida hua... saath kisi ne nahi diyastaff main kuchh sudhaar nahi hua vaapas private mein le aaye*)" ~ Krishna

As members of the wealthier Swami and Rajput castes, these parents, while angry that their preferred public school was not providing a decent quality education for their children, were not trapped. Instead they were able to exit GUPS Hindi and readmit their children in one of the private schools. Exit is not, however, a strategy available to many from the poorer caste groups. Low caste households in Rasola have strong views about the quality of the education available in Rasola. But unlike the higher castes, poor households cannot always 'vote with their feet' and swap schools. In Rasola, Harijan households send their children to both GUPS Hindi and the Sanskrit School. Some households have exited GUPS Hindi and moved to the Sanskrit School. For these families it was their perception of the headmasters that tended to play the key role in schooling choice. The headmaster of the Sanskrit school is liked by the community. Poor families that want regular schooling in the State's dominant language, Hindi, are in the worst position and become trapped, their choice limited to attending a dysfunctional school or dropping out (see Box 2). Beyond class 8, there was no government school in the village.

Box 2: No voice, no exit

Nikku and Jhuna are from a poor Rajput family. Both had attended GUPS Hindi but had dropped out from the school after completing class 8 and 6 respectively. Nikku said "No teaching takes place there, all the notebooks have remained blank (*padhai vahaan hoti nahi, saare ke saare copy khaali padi hain*)". Jhuna agreed and said that they did not learn anything from the school, not even enough to teach their younger brother. Nikku dropped out of school after class 8 because there was no government secondary school in the village. The family was not willing to enrol the children in the private school (JK Public) due to the high costs involved. They also felt the environment was not good. And they felt that enrolling in a government school outside the village was not an option for their family.

The expansion of the schooling market in Rasola has produced some competition between the schools for students. The Sanskrit school headmaster is widely reported to visit households and actively motivate parents to send their children to his school. Interestingly, this competition has not appeared to have enhanced parents' 'voice' in the market place. Only the Brahman households appear to have some voice (Box 3). While it was Rajasthan government policy that led to the opening of the Sanskrit school in Rasola, the Brahman households feel a strong sense of ownership and pride in the school and its quality. They are wealthy enough to afford private schooling, but the opportunity for an education in Sanskrit and Vedic practices at a very low cost is the preferred option for this group showing that cultural status and caste identity are more important considerations for them. No child belonging to the Brahman community attended GUPS Hindi.

Box 3: Yes voice, yes exit

There is a strong sense of ownership of the Sanskrit school by Brahman families: "Our Sanskrit School is good... the discipline is good, the children are good (*Sanskrit hamaara to badia... anushaashan bhi badia, dabro bhi badia.*)" ~ Hariram

In Rasola, there is no group that emulates the fourth 'yes voice, no exit' scenario. It seems parents are not necessarily successful in demanding improvements in the quality of the teaching experience in school. As discussed above (see Box 1), both well-off and poor parents tried to exercise their 'voice' to improve the provision of education at GUPS Hindi. Both groups failed, making GUPS Hindi a school that is reportedly deteriorating in quality very quickly, and increasingly, providing education only to the poorest families. Where parents feel they have no exit and no voice, the idea of schooling 'choice' becomes quite meaningless and some make the choice not to enrol (see Box 2).

The study found that the introduction of private schooling options provided a new locus along which social barriers of caste, class and gender were expressed and consolidated. Nearly all the children from socially disadvantaged groups were in government schools while private schools were more often the choice for children from OBC households that are economically better off, and for some boys from SC households. Within the government sector, differences in quality of schools available led to further stratification with the Brahmins accessing the Sanskrit school, and the most dysfunctional school being accessed by families who appeared to have neither voice nor exit options.

*Names have been changed.

Fennell, Shailaja. 2007. "Tilting at Windmills: Public-Private partnerships in Indian Education Today." *Contemporary Education Dialogue* 4:2: 193-216.

4.2.3 Private schooling nearly five times more expensive

As in the PROBE Survey in 1996, parents in the 2006 Survey were asked how much they spend on a selected child's schooling on all related items of expenditure including fees, books, stationery, uniforms, private tuition and transport. It was found that while costs of schooling in government and private schools were markedly different in 1996, by 2006 the differences have become even greater. There has been a small reduction in government school costs at primary level from Rs 318 in 1996 to Rs 280 in 2006 in real terms (see Table 4.5). This can be attributed to the increased state investment in incentives (which include free textbooks and midday meals for all children, and free uniforms and scholarships for some). There has been a considerable increase in private school costs in the same period – in real terms this went from Rs 940 in 1996 to Rs 1360 in 2006. Thus, while private schooling was nearly 3 times (on average) as expensive as government schooling in 1996, it was nearly 5 times as expensive in 2006.

Table 4.5 Comparing annual costs of government and private schooling at primary level

	(in rupees)	
	1996	2006
Government	318	280
Private	940	1360

Note: Costs for 2006 have been converted using 1996-7 prices as the base.

Source: Household surveys: PROBE, 1996; PROBE Revisited, 2006.

Table 4.6 gives the average annual expenditure in current prices in 2006 for children in government and private schools, and its break-up in different categories. Although expenditure for primary-school children in government schools has declined in real terms between the two surveys, even these costs in 2006 of Rs 454 per child per year at current prices can be crippling for a rural family with meagre and insecure income. Close to 30 per cent of surveyed households reported casual labour as their main source of income and nearly half had no land or at most 1 acre of land.

The 2006 Survey found that the bulk of reported expenditure for government school children is on books and stationery and on uniforms (79%), and this was the same as in the 1996 Survey. School fees, in 2006, were only 6 per cent of the total. In contrast, in the case of private schooling, school fees were extremely high, in absolute terms (Rs 864 per child per year) and as a proportion of the total (39%). The amounts that were spent on books and stationery (Rs 584 per child per year), uniforms (Rs 367 per child per year), private tuition (Rs 207 per child per year), and transport and other costs (Rs 182 per child per year) were also high in absolute terms.

Table 4.6 Item-wise costs of primary schooling in 2006: government and private

(average annual costs in rupees at current prices)

	Costs (Rs)		Per cent	
	Government	Private	Government	Private
Fees	27	864	6	39
Books/stationery	182	584	40	26
Uniforms	178	367	39	17
Private tuition	48	207	11	9
Transport and other costs	19	182	4	8
Total	454	2204	100	100

Source: Household surveys: PROBE 1996, PROBE Revisited, 2006.

However, the perception that government schools are "bad" and private schools "good" – whether well founded or not – has influenced the choices of some low-income families. There were families with even a small amount of extra money who reported that they felt compelled to send their child to a private school if they could at all manage it. The financial strain is then justified because of the belief that the child is attending

a better school, or they are getting something for the investment. However the family cannot always sustain the financial demands and the child may be taken out of the private school in a short while.

Considering the high costs of private schooling, it is not surprising, therefore, that private school enrolment was found to be weighted in favour of children from more advantaged caste groups, and children from families with more secure livelihoods. The financial burden associated with private schooling means that within some families distinctions are made, whereby the boys are enrolled in private and the girls in government schools.

It is important to note that private schools have a higher proportion of parents with the capacity to use their “voice”, based on their social and/or economic advantage. Looking at the reported expenditure on schooling, we also see that parents were providing much more support to a child in private school with higher expenditure on each of the different components. These factors certainly contribute to the higher learning achievements that the 2006 Survey found among children in private schools, which we discuss in the next section.

4.2.4 Learning achievements higher in private schools

Families of children in government and private schools reported that their enrolled children attended school regularly. Children reported that they liked going to school, and one important reason cited was learning. How much were they learning? As part of the 2006 Survey, the researchers administered a simple test of reading, filling in the blanks, and some mathematical problems (see Annexure 1) to children who were enrolled in classes 4-5. The results are given in Table 4.7.

The tests were simple, and the results were well below what could be expected from children with more than three years of schooling.

- Coming first to reading and comprehension of children enrolled in government schools, we found that one-fifth of the children could not read at all. However, most of those who could read were able to understand the simple story, and write the one-word replies in the blanks. Although 80 per cent of the children could read, only 37 per cent were able to read the simple text fluently.
- With regard to mathematical skills, over four-fifth of the children in government schools could manage simple additions, similar to the proportion who could read. Addition, which required ‘carry-over’, and simple subtraction could both be done by roughly two-thirds of children. Dividing by 5 could be done by less than half of the enrolled children. The data indicates clearly that basic literacy and numeracy is not assured for all children in classes 4 and 5 in government schools.
- Children enrolled in private schools performed better. Nearly all could read and more than three-fourths (78%) were able to read fluently. Most could also do the addition (92%) and subtraction (81%) correctly. Some (43%) struggled with division. But even these results, though better than for the children in government schools, indicate considerable scope for improvement.

Table 4.7 Literacy and numeracy among children in government and private schools

Proportion (%) of children in classes 4-5 who could:	Government	Private
read	80	98
comprehend -- write one-word replies	71	92
read fluently	37	78
Add	81	92
add, with carry over	67	87
Subtract	64	81
divide by 5	45	57

Note: Figures are based on 284 government school children and 84 private school children.

Source: Household survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

When looking at these variations in learning achievements between children enrolled in government and private schools, we need to recall:

- Government schools had a higher proportion of children from socially disadvantaged groups (SCs and STs). They also had a higher proportion of parents who are illiterate and casual labourers.
- Parents were providing much more support to a child in private school with higher expenditure on each of the different components (school fees, books and stationery, private tuition, uniforms, transport and other costs).

Although higher levels of basic literacy and numeracy among private school students indicate that private schools provide more teaching input, field observations and interviews suggest that many of the private schools were struggling to survive and could often only provide very poor infrastructure and inadequately-qualified and untrained teachers. A parent interviewed during the village studies commented that, “Influenced by the cities, village people send children to the private school but there are no teachers (*shaharon ko dekhkar gaon mein bhi private mein bhejte hain par master nahi hain*)”. Another parent had enrolled his children in a private primary school but claimed the school was like a ‘*sabzi mandi*’ (vegetable market)... “Leaflets were distributed, a bus was started, but there is nothing by way of studies (*parchi batwai, bus lagai, padhai ke naam par kuchh bhi nahi hai*)”. He felt it is all about advertising. An ex-sarpanch was very concerned about the quality of teachers in the private schools arguing that only a few teachers had done their BA, B.Ed. His view was that private schools do not have adequate funds to pay for qualified teachers and this means the quality of education that is offered is low. Certainly, innovative teaching-learning methods such as implemented in Tamil Nadu under the Activity-based Learning programme⁴ (see Box – Activity-based Learning) were nowhere in evidence in the private (or government) schools.

⁴ABL is currently (post the survey) being implemented in government schools in several PROBE states.

Activity Based Learning
Meera Pillai and Radha Ramaswamy

Mr. M.P. Vijayakumar, currently Honorary Advisor to the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan, was the pioneer of ABL in Tamil Nadu. He was inspired by the Rishi Valley Educational Resource Centre (RIVER). As Commissioner of the Corporation of Chennai, Tamil Nadu, he deputed groups of teachers and Block Resource Teacher Educators (BRTes) to the centre for training. They in turn adapted the materials and activity-based techniques to which they had been exposed to the Tamil Nadu state curriculum to create a methodology called Activity Based Learning (ABL) for use in their classrooms.

The Activity Based Learning method dispenses with textbooks. Rather,

- The skills and core competencies that children need to learn through the primary years are presented in the form of “learning ladders” – material in small incremental units on cards, to be completed serially, with self-evaluation cards at the end of each unit. This provides structure to the curriculum while allowing every child to learn at her own pace.
- Learning materials are colour-coded to show class-level, with insect and animal logos for different aspects of the curriculum. They are stacked on accessible shelves. Children help themselves to cards from the set on which they are working, instead of being assigned work by the teacher, increasing independence and engagement with their work.
- A blackboard is provided at the child’s eye level with a specific space for each child to write what he or she has learned that day. By scanning this blackboard, which runs around the classroom, the teacher is able to keep track of what each child is learning.
- Whereas in most classrooms, teachers have a general idea of who are the “bright” students in the class and the ones who are “failing”, with the mass of students falling into an undifferentiated average, ABL provides tools for a more refined understanding of the levels of achievement of each pupil. The teacher’s consolidated progress report, the “Achievement Chart”, takes note of what level the child is performing at for each subject, depending on the sequence of cards being worked on. Hence, a child might officially be in Standard IV, at the Standard II level in English, Standard IV level in Mathematics and Standard V level in Tamil.
- ABL also provides the flexibility for multi-age classrooms, with a government order specifying that classes may be combined in the way that the school considers most conducive to learning. This provides opportunities for peer-assisted learning.

In the first phase, the programme was implemented in one school each of the ten zones of the City Corporation. Weekly meetings were conducted with the teachers of the thirteen schools where, together with the Commissioner, two supervisors, a lecturer from DIET and a professor on lien from the DTER, etc., they discussed problems that came up during the application of the methodology in the classroom, looked for underlying causes, and came up with pedagogical solutions which teachers could apply the following week.

Feedback from the classrooms was used to refine the cards and prepare the prototypes for printing. Alongside the preparation of the materials, teachers up to Class 3 in all the primary and middle schools were trained to use the materials. When the programme started in June 2004, it did so with learning materials, workbooks, and trained teachers in place.

Both independent as well as in-house evaluations of the programme found much to commend it. Advantages included increasing the child’s sense of ownership of both the classroom space (with each child having a section of the blackboard) and the learning process (with each child setting the pace for his or her learning, and undertaking self-evaluation at regular intervals) and vanquishing “the *asura* called [the] Annual Exam”¹.

The ABL pedagogy was upscaled to cover the entire state in 2007. Realizing that a Government Order cannot change systems that have been in place for decades, Mr Vijayakumar, then State Project Director, SSA, Tamil Nadu provided for on-site support. He sent ABL trained teachers from the Chennai Corporation who had been working with the method for three to four years already to the districts to help put the new system in place. He personally called the DEOs, requesting them to assist the teacher trainers. “4-5 model schools were chosen, 100 schools in every block, BRTes were trained, and teachers were trained...The system has the capacity – materials reached the schools in 2-3 months...40-50 lakhs is a pittance for the government.”² The involvement of large numbers of teachers in the process had a significant impact.

Field visits confirmed that the ABL materials have, indeed, reached schools in remote tribal areas of Tamil Nadu as well. There have been problems with dilution attendant to the scaling up, as all teachers are yet to fully understand the philosophy and practices of the methodology. However, the children are happier even with this diluted version, liberated now from the tyranny of the textbook. Meanwhile, through exposure visits and training workshops, teachers continue to receive opportunities for capacity building at regular intervals.

¹S. Anandalakshmy, S. (2007). "Activity Based Learning: A Report on an Innovative Method in Tamil Nadu." Chennai: Bala Mandir.

²M.P. Vijayakumar (2007). Personal interview. September 13.

4.3 *The Child's Experience*

Socioeconomic factors have a key role to play in the child's experience through the primary-school years. Does the child get time and energy to attend school regularly or is there pressure on the child to be involved in other work during school hours? Is there time and space for the child to study at home? Can the child get help with his/her studies at home? Are there well-functioning anganwadis to provide crucial preparatory inputs during the vulnerable early years of the child's development? In this section we explore the impact of such factors on the child's schooling experience.

4.3.1 *Pressures on child to work*

One of the many reasons behind children not attending school is certainly the pressure to work. Dropping out is often preceded by the child attending school irregularly. Nearly one-third of the children who missed school on a working day during the week preceding the survey reported that the reason was work – household chores, care of another family member, or earning-related work.

Children are easily drawn into work which brings in income when the family is into farming or other types of self-employment, as was reported by 51 per cent of households. Their support is also critically needed by families with very low levels of economic security. In terms of livelihoods, this would include the 28 per cent of households who reported that they depended on casual labour as their main source of income. In terms of assets, the 46 per cent of households who reported that they were landless or had less than 1 acre of land would be a vulnerable group. The opportunity cost of sending children from these families to school would be, expectedly, high.

To get an idea of the extent of work that they undertook on a regular basis, children were asked about their activities the previous day.⁵ There was very little reporting of wage labour. Children's work consisted mainly of unpaid work with family members (on the fields and looking after animals), and in household chores (looking after younger children, cooking, cleaning, bringing water, collecting fuel).

Sixty one per cent of children in the 6-12 age group who were enrolled in government schools reported working, at home and/or outside (see Table 4.8). Some of this work was such that it did not have to come in the way of the child attending school. The children spent, on average, 1.2 hours/day on such activities. This was even lower than what was reported in 1996 (around 2 hours/day, see Table 4.9 which gives gender-disaggregated data for 1996 and 2006). As much of the child's work is with family members, it could be expected that it would be compatible with schooling, especially since the school-day is short. Even if one excludes those who reported that they do no work at all, the average time spent in work by enrolled children did not go above 1.9 hours/day.

Table 4.8 Average time spent on work by those in school and those out of school, 2006
(6-12 age group)

Proportion (%) who reported working among currently enrolled	61
out of school	82
Average time (hrs/day) spent in work among all children currently enrolled	1.2
out of school	5.5
Average time (hrs/day) spent in work among children who reported that they did some work	

⁵ This method of collecting time-use data to get an idea of the extent of child work is useful because child work is generally unpaid and hence under-valued and under-reported.

currently enrolled	1.9
out of school	5.9

Notes: 1. Work includes paid work and unpaid family labour. The latter includes care of younger children, the elderly and the ill, as well as other household chores (such as cooking, cleaning, bringing water, collecting fuel).

Source: Household survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

Comparing hours spent by children in the 6-12 age group who are out of school with those enrolled revealed sharp differences. The average time spent in work activities for all out of school children was 5.5 hours/day compared to 1.2 hours/day for the enrolled. And if one excludes the 18 per cent out of school who reported doing no work at all, the time spent by these young children in work was close to 6 hours/day.

The 2006 Survey found that only a small proportion of children in the 6-12 age group were out of school (4.9%). Half of them had never been enrolled (2.5%), and half had been enrolled and later dropped out of school (2.4%). Had those who had dropped out done so because of pressures of work.⁶ Interviews with parents indicate that this was indeed the case for most. An example comes from a mother of 3 children from Barvadih village of Sidhi district in MP who reported that she had to withdraw her only daughter (aged 9) from school to “go with her father to graze the sheep” (*pita ke saath bhed charvaane ke liye*).

Table 4.9 Changes in average time spent in work, 1996-2006
(6-12 age group)

Average time (hours / day) spent in work among:	1996	2006
Currently enrolled		
Boys	2.1	1.0
Girls	2.9	1.5
Out of school		
Boys	4.2	6.5
Girls	5.0	5.2

Source: Household surveys: PROBE 1996, PROBE Revisited 2006.

When we compare the situation in 2006 with the situation in 1996, and disaggregate it by gender, we see that there has been a sharp rise in work demands on boys who were out of school (see Table 4.9). The average time spent in work activities was 4.2 hours/day in 1996 but this was as high as 6.5 hours/day in 2006. The boys who were out of school were few in number and a high proportion of them were doing work which brings in income. There was a much smaller change in the average time spent in work activities by girls – it was 5 hours/day in 1996 and 5.2 hours/day in 2006. Girls continued to be involved primarily in household work.

It appears that there has been a sharp decline in nowhere children (defined as those neither at school nor at work). The main reason reported by parents in 2006 for children who had dropped out of school was that “the child is needed for work”. ActionAid and MVF⁷ are working together to mobilise the community around certain non-negotiable principles for the emancipation of child labour (see Box – ActionAid and MVF: Effective Processes for Community Mobilisation around Education).

⁶ Spending long hours at work does not necessarily mean that work is the reason the child is no longer in school. Being out of school may also lead to children spending longer in work activities.

⁷ Since 1991, the MV Foundation has been working towards abolishing child labour in all its forms and mainstreaming the children into formal schools. Currently, MVF works with 2500 villages in Andhra Pradesh and provides technical support to many State governments in India and abroad.

ActionAid and MVF:
Effective Processes for Community Mobilization around Education
Sveta Dave-Chakravarty*

ActionAid is working on a Community Mobilization Toolkit, which is being conceptualized with a core team of MVF workers and then developed, trialed and refined in a one lab-mandal of Andhra Pradesh.

At the centre of and foundational to the toolkit are MVF's non-negotiable principles for the emancipation of child labour, seen as the essential challenge around which both community and institutions can be mobilized:

- All children must attend full-time formal day schools
- Any child out of school is a child labourer
- All labour is hazardous and harms the overall growth and development of the child
- There must be total abolition of child labour; any law regulating child work is unacceptable
- Any justification perpetuating the existence of child labour must be condemned.

These principles become the basis for establishing a universal norm that all children should be in school and therefore that all barriers to their enrollment and attendance must be overcome, through the joint efforts of the community and the school (system). Effective ways of working to enable community workers to establish this norm have been identified as

- Maintain a moral space around the non-negotiable principles
- Include the whole community as potential allies
- Focus on energizing existing institutions and mechanisms rather than establishing parallel institutions
- Trust the community to find the ways and means to achieve the norm

After a "community" is formed around this goal, issues of education quality can become its focus, what in the toolkit are called Stretch Non-negotiables:

- All teachers and children attend school
- Infrastructure in place, appropriately utilized and maintained
- Positive learning environment without corporal punishment
- Experiential rather than rote learning
- Inclusive education for all abilities
- All children achieving their potential

The toolkit is being developed as a facilitator's guide for process-based capacity-building of community in four areas related to school-support:

- Resources (understanding norms and accessing resources);
- Professionals (understanding, seeking, and supporting "professionalism" of education providers);
- Academic (understanding and supporting development of educational content and pedagogies);
- Political (understanding institutional mechanisms, structures etc).

Tools provide technical literacy to enable communities to access support in a way which empowers the community. Thus, within the *political* sphere, tools for both self-reform of the VEC and for advocacy, for example of the agenda of non-negotiables, are provided (including the statutory role of VEC, its terms of reference, its constitution etc.)

The tools are intended to ensure that school-support teams become "learning communities" working towards long-term, sustainable, empowering solutions for schools. The "learning community" in its collective identity can seek out resources for a common goal and generate new knowledge out of its own context.

If it is to be effective, the toolkit has to address all the groups, at all levels of the system, which are required to support the change at school level. These groups, "that have their own culture and mode of functioning" must "in turn form [learning] communities in their own right". Thus it would be expected that at cluster, block, district and state levels, and indeed at national level, groups of stakeholders start to function as "learning communities", to collectively identify needs and seek solutions to enable change on the ground.

The team suggests that the same non-negotiable goals (enrolment, attendance etc) and ways of working (moral space, inclusion, no parallel institutions etc) are effective at different levels in the hierarchy. The leader of one support level is always encouraged to mobilize and empower the leaders in the level below them to achieve the non-negotiable goals.

The capacity to replicate this mobilization process also exists. The team feels that MVF has evolved a system that keeps producing people with deep commitment to the core principles of community mobilization around child rights. ActionAid has launched a fellowship through which MVF workers are seconded for one year to ActionAid partners in other states, to use this community mobilization technology to promote organizational change.

*In conversation with Chris Marsden and Anjela Taneja, ActionAid.

4.3.2 Children get little family help with school work

A large proportion (43%) of currently enrolled children in the sample said that they had difficulties understanding their teacher. An even larger proportion (59%) said that they had difficulties understanding their text. This is not surprising in the light of the fact that many teachers did not speak the dialects spoken by the children, and that the texts were all in the official language of the state. Problems in comprehending the texts are aggravated by the fact that many children live in an oral culture with little or no exposure to printed material in their home environments (see Box – The Early Literacy Project).

In the light of limited teaching input at school, the role of the home environment assumes even greater importance. Having someone to turn to when learning-related queries arise is a crucial form of home support required in these circumstances.

Going by the responses of parents of the currently enrolled children, more than half (52%) do not get any assistance with their studies. In the majority of these cases, there is no educated person in the family to perform this role. One might expect that there would be some improvements in the literacy levels of households since 1996. Surprisingly, we found, little change in this respect. The figure for households in which fathers are illiterate was 31 per cent in the 1996 Survey and 34 per cent in the 2006 Survey. Interestingly, in the same period, proportion of households with literate mothers increased from 24 per cent to 34 per cent, while households in which both parents were illiterate remained almost the same in 2006 (31%) as they were in 1996 (30%). As schooling has become a norm, families whose children were not enrolled earlier, are now sending them to school.

Table 4.10 Literacy status of parents of currently enrolled children in 6-12 age group

Proportion (%) of households with:	1996	2006
Father illiterate	31	34
Mother illiterate	76	66
Both parents illiterate	30	31

Source: Household surveys: PROBE 1996, PROBE Revisited, 2006.

4.3.3 Children from socially disadvantaged groups are marginalised

Low levels of literacy among both parents go side by side with economic and social disadvantage. Socially disadvantaged groups (the dalits, the Muslims, and the tribals) formed two-fifths of the households in our sample. The implications of being socially disadvantaged are deep and wide-ranging and we are only touching upon some of them here. As mentioned in chapter 3, the bulk of teachers were from socially advantaged groups (“general castes” and OBCs). Some parents from socially disadvantaged groups felt that teachers’ behaviour revealed discriminatory attitudes towards their children. We mention two examples below.

- A Chamar (SC) family of seven from Bhabua district, Bihar – the parents work as agricultural labourers and have three daughters in the 6-12 age group, and two sons younger than that. The father said, “The Brahmans of the village dominate the lower castes. All the teachers of the school are Brahmans. Teaching at the school is not good. The master doesn’t teach our children properly... We are not given any incentives, we live in one corner of the village. If we demand anything, we are abused and beaten because we belong to a lower caste (*Gaon ka Brahman samaaj choti jaati par haavi rehta hai. school ke sabhi master Brahman hai... school mein padhai ki vyavastha theek nahin. master ham logon ke bachchon ko theek se nahi padhaata...hamein protsaahan diya nahi jaata, ham gaon ke ek taraf rehte hain. agar kuchh maangte hain, to chhoti jaat hone ke kaaran atyaachar kiya jaata hai*)”.

The Early Literacy Project (ELP)

Keerti Jayaram

The Early Literacy Project (ELP) has aimed to address the reading and writing processes of young children who come from marginalized socio-cultural groups that typically underachieve in schools by attempting to develop culturally and linguistically meaningful classroom practices. Since July 2006, ELP has been engaged with intensive classroom based interventions with young beginning and early readers and writers in Hindi, within both the urban and the rural contexts. This work began in 2006 in a few government (MCD) primary schools located on the outskirts of Delhi. In 2008 ELP was relocated to rural government primary schools in Rajasthan, with an external evaluation undertaken by the Regional Institute of Education (REI), Ajmer. Currently this work is being implemented in partnership with the SWRC, Barefoot College within more informal learning situations such as bridge schools and night schools.

ELP attempts to use available insights within early literacy research and literature to develop classroom based methodologies that aim to strengthen the children's skills of phonological processing, as well as their processes of meaning construction. This is an on going process within which these methodologies develop through an intensive and sustained interface with the complexities inside classrooms. The understanding within ELP is that classroom based learning methods that evolve organically and are grounded in classroom realities will be meaningful for the children and teachers who use them, since they will be sensitive to the linguistic and developmental needs children and also to the socio-historical contexts that the children and teachers come from

Conceptualization of ELP

Within the contemporary world efficient reading and writing have become essential tools for learning both inside and outside the school. For a large number of children from socially marginalized communities, however, this world remains out of reach since they are unable to attain mastery over reading and writing skills. Although such children bring to school classrooms a rich repertoire of language, background knowledge, identities, discourses and life experience, they have been found to achieve at lower levels than their more middle class peers. Recent research has claimed that one important reason for this poor performance is the gap between the school and home environments of such children.

Within the Indian context, while the difference between home languages and school languages has been identified as a source of concern, a parallel concern which has not received as much attention is the shift that a large number of young children are required to make from the oral cultures in their homes to the unfamiliar print culture of a classroom. Research on Early Literacy indicates that this transition does not come naturally, and it can in fact be very challenging for children who do not have any support for reading and writing in their home and social environments. Within the rural schools in Rajasthan in some schools it took ELP a couple of months of work with children in Class 1 just to establish meaningful sound-symbol relationships for a few written letters. Most of the children in these classes actively engage with the written forms of language for the first time only when they step into school, since there is hardly any opportunity to engage with written words in their homes and real life situations.

We believe that for children who come from homes where there is limited access to written words, the transition to the written mode needs to be made more accessible and child friendly. Translated into classroom practice this has implied functioning at two levels:

- i) Beginners level – the focus is on building the foundations for initial reading and writing through a linguistically controlled and structured approach called the *Varna Samooha* methodology.
- ii) More advanced level- the focus is on developing supportive classroom environments and activities which strengthen meaningful reading and writing in Hindi.

The ELP methods combine a structured approach along with opportunities for free exploration, so that the children are gradually equipped to express their words, ideas, and real-life experiences through written and pictorial forms. This enables them to experience reading and writing processes as non-threatening and meaningful for them.

Over the last year ELP's work has shifted its focus to 'out of school children' from the poorest and most marginalized sections of rural society in Rajasthan through night schools and bridge schools. This has involved stepping into world where poverty, social traditions entrenched in a long history and hostile natural forces rub shoulders to weave a complex social fabric. We found that many of these children, who have not survived the formal mainstream school, begin to blossom in the nurturing environment of the bridge school. These schools provide the non threatening environment that is crucial for helping such children actualize their potentials. They serve as important stepping stones which empower the children to engage with the mainstream school system with confidence. The work has been very challenging and reinforced our belief that if we want to regard schools as places where all children will learn, regardless of their home circumstances, then it is vital to build informed understandings of the specific socio-cultural contexts within which learning occurs, so as to ensure that children from oral backgrounds are adequately equipped to engage with school-based learning in meaningful and empowering ways.

- Another Chamar family from a village in Bahraich District, Uttar Pradesh reported about their 7 year-old son's teacher: "The teacher says that [the boy] is the son of a Chamar – I will not teach him (*adhyaapika kehti hai ki chamar ka ladka hai, ham nahi padhaayenge*)".

The schooling of children from scheduled caste and scheduled tribe groups also suffered because their families had little economic security, as well as few educated members, compared to those from socially-advantaged groups. Pressures on them to attend only irregularly and finally drop out were thus cumulative. From within the school, they experienced a sense of marginalization and exclusion as they grappled with discriminatory attitudes from teachers and other children, and with textbooks which they could not understand and which were written from a privileged caste and class perspective. They could not count on family members to ensure their regular attendance in school, or give them adequate time for study at home, or help them with their studies.

4.3.3 Limited early childhood care and education

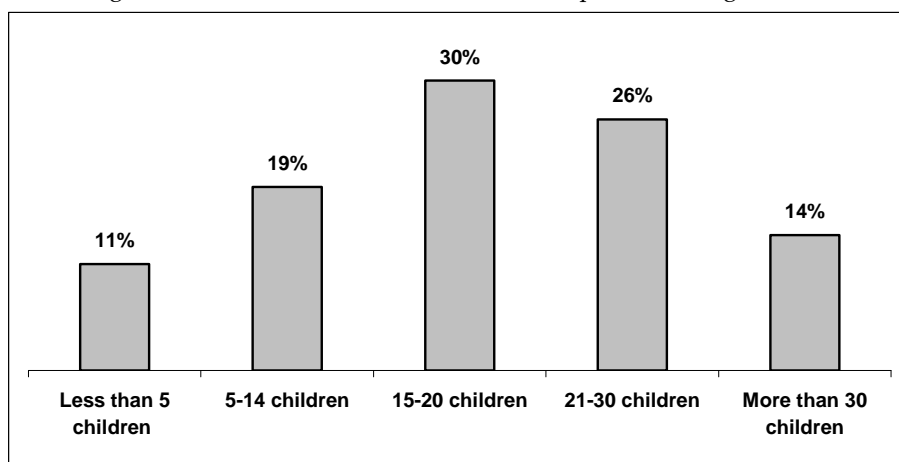
The importance of early childhood care and education is widely accepted. To provide care for the 0-6 age group and for pregnant and nursing mothers, the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) scheme is operational in towns and villages across the country, and efforts are being made to provide universal coverage.

The 2006 Survey found that only three-fourths of the villages surveyed had an anganwadi. The proportion of villages without anganwadis was highest in the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. It also persists in the other PROBE states.

The anganwadis in the surveyed villages were found to open around 8 am or 9 am. Many of these centres did not have their own building but functioned from the *panchayat bhavan* and primary schools. Close to three-fifths (58%) of the centres surveyed were located near the primary school, making it possible, in theory, for girls caring for siblings in the 3-5 age group to attend primary school.

The ICDS scheme is operationalised through the appointment of anganwadi workers and anganwadi helpers. The 2006 Survey found that the anganwadi workers were largely from the village. While 28 per cent were from SC or ST communities, the majority was from more privileged caste groups (OBCs and "general castes"). This has implications in terms of the anganwadi worker's accountability to the socially-disadvantaged households in the village.

Fig. 4.11a Variations in numbers of children present in anganwadis



Note: Figures give the proportion (%) of anganwadis which had the specified number of children present on the day of the survey.

In terms of children present in the anganwadi at the time of the team's visit to the village, the numbers were quite varied (see Fig. 11a). Thirty per cent had between 15 and 20 children present, of which the anganwadi in Meenapur (see Box) is an example. Another 26 per cent had between 21 and 30 children present. Altogether 70% of anganwadis had 15 or more children present.

A Functioning Anganwadi?

Meenapur* in Hardwar district, Uttarakhand was observed to have a functioning anganwadi. The children began to arrive at about 8:30 in the morning. By 9:30 a.m., 16 children were present. There were two anganwadi workers and two helpers who laid some blankets on the floor. The children were made to stand in a circle and sing poems with matching actions which the workers taught them. The group was very lively and enjoyed the activity.



However, there were major problems. The village was supposed to have two anganwadi centres, one in the government primary school compound, and the other in the village panchayat bhavan. After a recent meeting, the panchayat bhavan had been locked and the keys were not given to the anganwadi workers. Since then both the anganwadi centres have been running jointly in the government primary school compound, right next to the kitchen, with a blackboard put up on the wall. Together, they were catering to a total of 16 children. These few children were being given dry food once or twice a week as, the anganwadi workers claimed, they had not been given money to continue the regular feeding programme. The anganwadi scheme in this village appears to be greatly deficient both in terms of coverage and services.

*The name of the village has been changed.

The picture reported by parents regarding the provision of early childhood care suggests that the ICDS scheme is having limited success. Among the families (with a child in the 3-5 age group) who reported that their village had an anganwadi, only 38 per cent had enrolled their child in it. Some families were already sending their young children to school. The 2006 Survey found that 30 per cent of 3-5 year olds in the sample households were enrolled in class 1 in government schools, where field observation indicates they are generally ignored. Another 10 per cent were in private schools which offered pre-school education.

Table 4.11b Anganwadis: coverage and services

Proportion (%) of surveyed villages with an anganwadi	75
Proportion (%) of households (with a child in the 3-5 age group) who had an anganwadi in their village and had enrolled their child in it	38
Proportion (%) of households with a child enrolled in an anganwadi who reported that:	
their child is given food in the anganwadi	96
their child is taught in the anganwadi	74
their child receives health services through the anganwadi	48

Source: Village survey and household survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006

In terms of services available in the anganwadi, the picture is quite varied. It is best for nutritional inputs -- 96 per cent of households reported that the young child is given food. The situation is slightly worse for pre-school education -- 74 per cent reported that the child is taught in the anganwadi. In terms of use of health services in the anganwadi, the figure drops to 48 per cent (see Table 4.11). It is good that the ICDS scheme is being able to meet some of its goals for the 3-5 age group. However, improving services for the entire 0-6 age group to ensure better nutrition, pre-school education, and complete immunisation from preventable disease is an area of serious concern, as neglect at this stage has serious consequences for the child's progress in school and beyond.

Conclusion

The good news from the 2006 Survey is that most 6-12 year olds now attend school and that there has been a huge drop in the proportion of children out of school. This is in part a reflection of parents' keenness for their children to attend school and in part due to aspects of government policy that have improved access to primary schooling -- especially for children from socially and economically disadvantaged families. Parents are very articulate about why they want to educate their children although reasons given differ for sons and daughters. For boys, parents expect that education will deliver good employment and higher income. The 2006 Survey found that families' aspirations for their girl children have increased considerably since 1996 and that they have multiple motivations for sending their girls to school. Schooling is thought to improve employment options as well as marriage prospects, self-confidence and a girl's role as mother. While these are all positive developments, the 2006 Survey shows very clearly that the schooling experience of a child is shaped quite significantly by the family's socio-economic status.

School provision has grown and changed significantly in the ten years between the two surveys. Almost four-fifths of children in the 6-12 age group continue to attend government schools, although private schools have been rapidly increasing as an alternative choice for parents. The 2006 Survey found that enrolment patterns in government and private schools are marked by socio-economic and gender issues. Higher caste families enrol their children disproportionately in private schools, although government schools still continue to cater to the majority of 6-12 year old children from all backgrounds -- 67 per cent of "general castes", 73 per cent of OBCs, and 90 per cent of SCs and STs. Across the PROBE states, boys were more likely to be enrolled in private schools than girls. These patterns show that pre-existing social inequalities are being reproduced through the increase in schooling choices made available, a matter of concern because schooling is a critical pathway for addressing social inequality. The 2006 Survey found a considerable increase in the relative cost of private schooling, and this appears to be one reason for the fact that the relative share of enrolled children in private schools is still the same in 2006 as it was in 1996. Our basic skills tests shows that students in private schools do better than students enrolled in government schools, but even the private schools do not ensure these basic skills for all students.

We found that socio-economic factors have a key role to play in the level of support a child receives to get through the schooling process. Given the limited teaching activity observed during the 2006 Survey (as described in Chapter 3), the influence of the home environment is particularly important for a student's learning. There were only a few low-income households where boys had dropped out early because they were required to work to support the family. For girls, the need for help with household chores, in the fields and with animals often limited their schooling experience. Sometimes this work did not interrupt the school day and the 2006 Survey is encouraging in providing evidence that the time school-children spend on work is declining significantly. Apart from the need to be released from work to attend school and to study at home, children also need the help of adults with their school-work. We found more than half the parents in the 2006 Survey were not able to offer their children any such assistance. This was particularly the case amongst students in the government schools who tend to be from more disadvantaged and therefore less literate communities. Parents of children from socially disadvantaged groups also reported feeling marginalized on account of discriminatory experiences in school.

Overall the 2006 Survey indicates that there is a strong correlation between the socio-economic status of the family and the schooling experience and learning outcomes of the student. While it is encouraging that parents across the socio-economic divide are enthusiastic about education and willing to send their children to school, it does not appear that all children are in school and achieving even basic literacy and numeracy.

Chapter 5

UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOLING IN THE PROBE STATES

Primary education was the focus of the PROBE Survey in 1996. In 2006, the scope of the study was extended to include upper primary education (classes 6-8), also referred to as the middle stage of schooling. This was in line with the Constitutional guarantee of providing children the right to free education till the age of fourteen (when ideally they would have completed class 8), with this right now enshrined in the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009.

The cornerstone of this study of upper primary education is the 2006 Survey, which included a survey of schools and of households. In the selected villages,¹ all government and private schools with classes 6, 7 and 8 were surveyed. The sampling frame for the household survey consisted of randomly-selected households with a child in the 6-12 age group.² All children in these households, who were currently enrolled in upper primary classes, were the focus of the middle school study, as were those who had dropped out after enrolling in classes 6, 7 and 8. The focus was on the stage of schooling and not the age-group.

In terms of the choice of age-group which corresponds to classes 6, 7, and 8, in both the Directive Principles of our Constitution, and the 86th Constitutional Amendment, it is implicitly assumed that the Indian child starts schooling at 6 years of age and completes 8 years of education by the age of 14 – which in turn implies that the child completes the primary stage by the age of 11 and the middle stage by the age of 14. In the 2006 Survey, we have taken students in the 11-14 age group to be the cohort which corresponds to the middle stage of schooling.

5.1 *Enrolment*

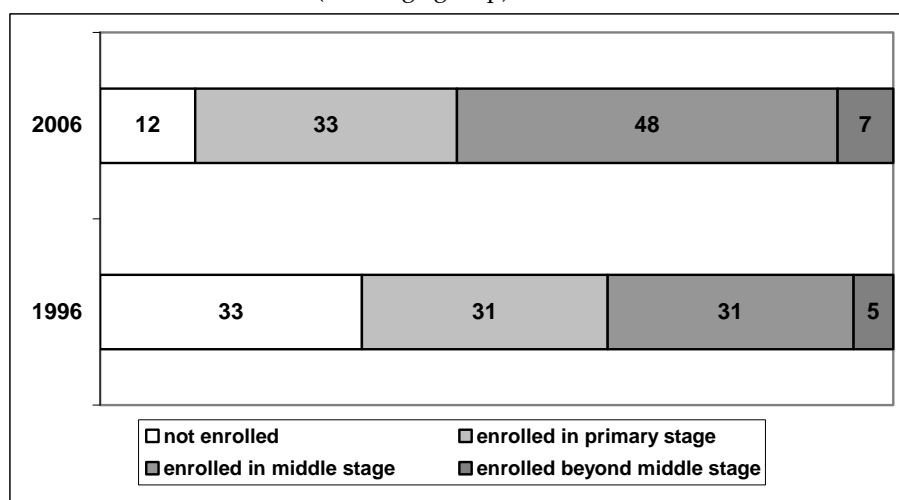
5.1.1 *Enrolment at the upper primary stage has increased*

At the upper primary or middle stage, similar to the primary stage, there has been a huge surge in enrolment between 1996 and 2006. The proportions enrolled in the 11-14 age group have risen from 67 per cent in 1996 to 88 per cent in 2006. However, there is also underage and overage enrolment at all stages of schooling and we find that the proportion of 11-14 year olds who were enrolled in grades 6-8 in 2006 was only 48 per cent. Although this is still low, it is a great improvement from 1996 when it was as low as 31 per cent.

¹These villages were the sample and neighbouring villages selected in the 2006 Survey. For more on the rationale for selection, see Chapter 1, Section 1.3.

²This was done to enable comparisons to be made between 1996 and 2006 for children in the 6-12 age group.

Fig. 5.1 Changes in Proportions Enrolled, 1996-2006
(11-14 age group)



Source: Household surveys: PROBE, 1996; PROBE Revisited, 2006.

The increase in school participation in the 11-14 age group indicates that there has been considerable progress between 1996 and 2006. Proportions reported to be out of school declined sharply from 33 per cent to 12 per cent (see Fig. 5.1). The proportions of 11-14 year olds enrolled in the middle stage and beyond increased from 36 per cent to 55 per cent.

The proportion of 11-14 year olds enrolled in the primary stage was still high in 2006 (33%). These children (who could be expected to be in middle stage) may be overage because of late enrolment or being kept back to repeat the year.³ Girls from this group are particularly vulnerable to being taken out of school. The opportunity costs associated with sending them to school rise as they get older, particularly once they are past the early years of primary school. The benefits of schooling for them are also perceived to be low. In the next section, we take a look at differences in enrolment rates between boys and girls, and between the socially disadvantaged groups (SCs and STs) and others (“general castes” and OBCs)? Was there any narrowing of the gaps between 1996 and 2006?

5.1.2 Variations among social groups

Considerable investment has been made to draw children into school at the primary level. Most noticeable were the range of incentives given to enrolled children, some of which were universal and some targeted at children from vulnerable groups. In the previous section, we discussed how there was a rise in the proportions of 11-14 year olds enrolled in middle school between 1996 and 2006, although it remains low at 48%. When we unpack the overall figure by social categories, we find that some variations between the different groups (see Fig. 5.2). Proportion of 11-14 year old girls enrolled in middle stage (44%) is lower than among boys (52%). Enrolment among 11-14 year old children (in middle stage) from Scheduled Caste families (47%) was roughly similar to that among OBCs (48%). However, it was less than among “general castes” (52%). Enrolment among 11-14 year old tribal children in middle stage (40%) lagged considerably behind that among SC children. Looking at agricultural and non-agricultural labour households, we find that enrolment, among the specified age group, and in the specified stage, was relatively low (44% and 36%, respectively).

³Failure was reported to lead to dropping out – particularly for girls. Sometimes the children themselves are discouraged; more often parents are unwilling to persist with the schooling process, particularly for girls.

**Fig. 5.2 Variations in proportions enrolled in middle stage across social groups
(11-14 age group)**



Source: Household survey, PROBE Revisited, 2006

The overall picture indicates that we are far from getting all children enrolled in middle school. Although the 2006 Survey found that 88 per cent of children in the 11-14 age group were enrolled, 33 per cent were still in primary. It does not appear that all of those who were enrolled in primary would even enrol in middle school, let alone complete this stage. Among a group of 11-18 year olds, who had dropped out of school before completing class 8, the majority (72%) had dropped out during the primary stage itself or just after primary without enrolling in class 6.

In the rest of this chapter, we will focus on issues of access and quality of schooling at middle stage, towards understanding the challenges to improve supply and strengthen demand. While there are some similarities to the primary stage, there are also additional difficulties. Access to the middle stage of schooling is still a problem in many states. In terms of quality, apart from the need for better infrastructure and facilities, schools face a shortage of adequately trained teachers, who have to deal with a more advanced and varied curriculum than at primary level. Teachers at middle stage also have the challenge of building on the mostly inadequate base provided during the pre-primary and primary years. In an older age group, children take on more adult roles and gender becomes more significant in influencing parental decisions. Schooling also becomes more expensive at the middle stage, in government schools and even more so in private schools. Both the government and private school provision was quite heterogeneous, and parents were doing their best to make an informed decision.

5.2 *School provision: access and quality issues*

5.2.1 *Access to middle school: improved but still a major hurdle*

With the government expanding focus from primary to elementary education, the middle stage of schooling has got a boost. Around one-fifth of all schools in the 2006 Survey of middle schools had been set up between 1996 and 2006.⁴

The expansion in upper primary schooling facilities is one of the major reasons for increased school participation at this stage, particularly for girls. The 2006 Survey found that the majority (87%) of parents felt that the journey to school was safe for their enrolled daughters. As expected, distances were greater than for children enrolled at primary level. Only one-third of children attending middle school reported that it took them less than 10 minutes to get to school, a situation which was common among children enrolled in primary schools. Children enrolled at the middle stage took 25 minutes on average to get to school.⁵ For a few children, the journey to school was actually unsafe. An example is Rachna in class 8 in a village in Farukkabad district in UP whose parents reported, “It is not safe to go to school because it is across a river and through a forested area, and quite a distance (*beeekh mein nadi padti hai aur jungle bhi padta hai, door bhi hai, isliye surakshit nahi hai jana*)”.

As of 2006, access to middle schools remained poor in large parts of the surveyed states. This is discussed at length in the Box -- Access to Middle Schools Remains a Hurdle. Using DISE data, it looks at state-wise variations along two parameters: ratio of primary sections to upper primary sections, and average class size at upper primary stage. The urgent need to improve access to schooling is apparent.

Evidence of problems with access to upper primary schooling also comes from interviews in the 2006 Survey with children who had dropped out of school. Over one-third of those who had dropped out of school without completing class 8 had dropped out after completing class 5 and before enrolling in class 6. Such dropping out tends to occur when children have to transition after primary school to another school, and particularly among girls when the middle school is not in the same village. DISE data is useful to compare dropout rates in different states, and we see that dropping out after class 5 is quite high in all the PROBE states. It is highest in UP (35%) and lowest in Rajasthan (15%) (see Box -- State-wise Variations in Dropout Rates, 2006-07). It is likely that transitional dropping out would decline as availability of middle schooling continues to improve under the SSA's focus on elementary education and the widespread upgrading of primary schools.

⁴ These were primarily standalone upper primary schools (with only classes 6, 7 and 8).

⁵ Nearly half said it took them 30 minutes or more to get to school.

Access to Middle Schools Remains a Hurdle: State-wise Variations

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) aims to provide one school with upper primary classes for every two primary schools. While there is reasonably good compliance of the distance norm for upper primary schools, all the PROBE states fall far short of the required number (see Table 1 below). Jharkhand has the least provision of upper primary sections compared to primary sections among all the states. The ratio of primary to middle sections is worse if we consider only government schools in rural areas. There is a need for many more schools for this stage.

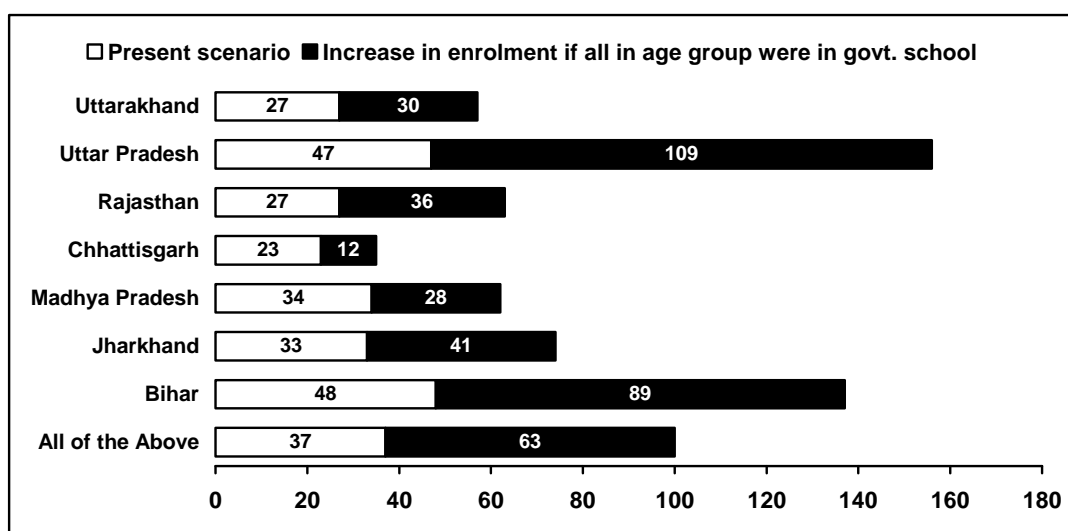
Table 1 Access to middle schools

State	Ratio of primary sections to upper primary sections		
	All schools	All government schools	Government schools in rural areas
Bihar	2.9	3.0	3.1
Jharkhand	3.7	3.9	4.1
Madhya Pradesh	2.7	3.3	3.5
Chhattisgarh	2.2	2.4	2.4
Rajasthan	2.3	3.1	3.1
Uttarakhand	2.8	3.4	3.4
Uttar Pradesh	2.8	3.1	3.1

Source: DISE, State report cards – 2006-07.

Another aspect of insufficient schools is seen through the average class size. Using the DISE data and dividing enrolment in middle stage by the number of sections in the middle stage for schools of all managements, we find that the average class size is extremely high in Bihar (48) and UP (47) (see Fig. 2 below). Even in states such as Jharkhand and MP, where the average is 33, there will be schools where the class size is over 40. In addition, if we accept that the state has the primary responsibility of providing schools for UEE and if all in the relevant age group (11 to 14 years) were in school and enrolled in the upper primary stage (NER =1), average class size would be as high as 100.

Fig. 2 Average number of students per class in upper primary stage – 2006-07



Source: State report cards – 2006-7.

State-wise Differences in Dropout Rates, 2006-07

DISE data attempt to measure dropout rates, and we get an estimate of the size of the problem from the DISE State Report Cards. In 2006-07, dropout rates (proportion of students who have dropped out of school in a particular grade in the current academic year out of the total number of students enrolled in the same grade at the beginning of the academic year) after class 5 were unusually high – varying from 15 per cent in Jharkhand to 39 per cent in Uttar Pradesh, and were significant but lower in classes 6 and 7 (see Fig. 1).

It is also useful to look at the transition rates from primary to upper primary (that is the percentage of children enrolled in class 6 in the current academic year as a proportion of children enrolled in class 5 in the previous academic year). It is seen that in 2006-07, these transition rates are quite low for all the surveyed states. They are lowest in Uttar Pradesh (65%) and only slightly higher in Madhya Pradesh and Bihar (both 67%). Transition rates are highest in Rajasthan (85%).

Table 1. Dropout rates and transition rates, 2006-07

	Dropout rates for			Transition rate between primary and upper primary
	Class 5	Class 6	Class 7	
Bihar	31	10	23	67
Jharkhand	15	2	10	78
Uttar Pradesh	39	7	5	65
Uttarakhand	22	7	4	81
Madhya Pradesh	22	2	2	67
Chhatisgarh	23	15	8	72
Rajasthan	16	10	4	85

Notes: Dropout rates give the proportion of students who have dropped out of school in a particular grade in the current academic year out of the total number of students enrolled in the same grade at the beginning of the academic year. Transition rates give the proportion of students enrolled in class 6 as a proportion of students enrolled in class 5 in the previous year.

Source: Elementary education in India. State report cards – 2006-07.

5.2.2 Variations in type of schools and their functioning

Three types of government schools had upper primary classes: one, schools which included both the primary and upper primary stage but not beyond (i.e. “1-8 schools”); two, schools with only upper primary classes (i.e. “6-8 schools”); and three, secondary and senior secondary schools in which the lowest class was the sixth and the highest was the tenth or twelfth (i.e. “6-10 schools” and “6-12 schools”). The 1-8 schools were under local-body / panchayat management, as were most 6-8 schools. The 6-10 and 6-12 schools were under the Department of Education in the respective state government, and have historically been better funded and administered than the schools under local-body management. Table 5.3 presents data on the differences between these schools on a range of factors, which we shall discuss below.

Numerically, the 1-8 schools were the most significant (52%), and most prominent in Rajasthan. Bihar also had a fair number of such schools. The 6-8 schools formed 35 per cent of the sample, prominent in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Secondary and senior secondary schools formed only a small proportion (13%) of these schools. Nearly all were in Rajasthan.

Table 5.3 Variations in government schools with the upper primary stage

	Type of school with upper primary stage			All schools with upper primary classes (classes 1-8, 6-8, 6-10, 6-12)
	Primary cum upper primary classes (classes 1-8)	Upper primary classes only (classes 6-8)	Secondary / higher secondary (classes 6-10 or 6-12)	
Number of schools	60	40	15	115
% of schools with enrolment >100	37	50	73	46
% of schools with PTR < 40	27	63	93	48
% of schools* with attendance > 75% on the day of the survey	28	55	73	43

*Note: *Data here is specifically for classes 6-8 only, and based on the register.*

Source: School survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006

Class size in these schools tended to vary. Close to half (46%) of all schools with upper primary grades had an enrolment greater than 100, which meant an average class size of 33.⁶ Enrolment was lowest in the 1-8 schools, indicating that these had a smaller catchment area compared to the other schools. Only 37 per cent had more than a hundred students compared to 50 per cent of the 6-8 schools and 73 per cent of the 6-10/6-12 schools. The teacher allocation for these 1-8 schools was much lower than it was for the other schools such that the pupil-teacher ratios were highest in the 1-8 schools. Only 27 per cent of these schools had a PTR of less than 40, while this was true for 63 per cent of the 6-8 schools and 93 per cent of the 6-10 schools. Taking all schools together, the figure was close to half.

The 1-8 schools appeared to have a similar environment to 1-5 schools; of particular significance was that most teachers taught both primary and upper primary classes. This was true for para-teachers as well. Multi-grade teaching was commoner in these schools than in the 6-8, 6-10 and 6-12 schools.⁷ Student absenteeism was also the highest in the 1-8 schools, indicating that these schools functioned most poorly among the three types of schools. Only 28 per cent of them had more than 75 per cent attendance on the day of the survey, while the same applied to 55 per cent of the 6-8 schools and 73 per cent of the 6-10 schools.

Overall, infrastructure and facilities for the upper primary stage was found to be extremely inadequate, though better than those available in standalone primary schools (1-5). While over 90 per cent of all schools with the middle stage (1-8, 6-8, 6-10, 6-12) had access to drinking water, a very low proportion had electricity. Toilets for girls were available in 57 per cent of schools, of particular importance for this older age group. However, they could be used in only 44 per cent of schools. Playgrounds existed in over three-fourth of schools. Library facilities were reported in 30 per cent of schools, but were actually functional in 24 per cent of them. Many schools visited did however have some construction activity going on at the time of the survey, indicating that the situation was going to improve. While the data indicates that standalone schools with classes 6 to 8 are better than the 1-8 schools, much depended on whether the schools had a separate building or not. When they shared the same infrastructure as primary schools, sometimes squeezed into one room or sometimes running in a different shift, there was not much difference between them and the 1-8 schools in terms of infrastructure.

Considering the variations in allocations and functioning of schools, it is not surprising that there was mixed feedback from parents on the infrastructure and facilities of middle schools. Parents' expectations were also not necessarily uniform. Parents of Meena enrolled in class 6 in the government middle school in Salempur in

⁶ Based on the assumption that grades 6-8 are all roughly of equivalent size, though in practice we would expect class 6 to be the largest and class 8 the smallest.

⁷ Within the 1-8 schools, the students of classes 6-8 usually had the relatively better rooms, and seating arrangements, and more teachers.

Muzaffarnagar in western UP, for example, were positive because they found the infrastructure much better than at the primary stage. Parents of Ruby enrolled in class 7 in the government middle school in Amadih, Shahdol, MP were critical, “there are no fans for the children, the school has sports equipment but the children aren’t allowed to use it, and when it rains, water comes into the school (*bacchon ke liye pankha nahi hai, khel ka samaan hai magar bacchon ko nahi diya jaata, aur baarish mein school ke ander paani bhar jaata hai*)”. This school would be one of many schools that do not provide a minimum one might expect in terms of facilities.

There was some positive feedback about overall school functioning. Eighty-four per cent of students reported that they did not have multi grade teaching. Three-fourths said they were given regular homework, and sixty-two per cent reported that they did not have a “free period” the previous day, all pointing to more functionality at this stage of schooling. This was in spite of the challenges which continue to exist in terms of teacher recruitment and teacher accountability at this stage.

5.2.3 Teacher recruitment and accountability: achievements and challenges

A high proportion of middle school teachers were regular teachers (close to four-fifths). The “contract teacher” phenomenon was limited at this stage, restricted to just 21 per cent of all teachers compared to 45 per cent in the case of the primary stage. The middle school teachers also had on average a higher level of education -- close to four-fifths were at least graduates, compared to just over one-half of teachers at primary stage. The high proportion of both regular teachers and graduate teachers is one indication that there has not been a widespread dilution of norms with regard to qualification and pre-service training among teachers at this stage.

Under SSA, middle school teachers receive additional in-service training. In this context, in the 2006 Survey, teachers reported that they had received in-service training on a range of issues, the most useful being on new methods of teaching. The teaching methods that were observed were generally conventional (see Box -- Teaching Methods Observed).

A brief look at the characteristics of teachers at the upper primary stage reveals that 83 per cent of teachers were male compared to 63 per cent of teachers at the primary stage. The appointment of fewer female teachers negatively impacts the enrolment and retention of girls, particularly in the 11-14 and 15-18 age groups. The teachers were also predominantly “general castes” and OBC (together close to 80%), and privileged within their community.⁸ The social distance between them and socially disadvantaged students is likely to affect the level of accountability they feel to parents and children from these communities.

As discussed in the previous section, the 2006 Survey found teacher allocations at the middle stage to be modest. The Pupil Teacher Ratio at the middle stage was 49. Around half of all schools had a PTR which was more than 40 (see section 5.2.2, Table 5.3), which gives us some idea of the extent of teacher shortage at this stage. Teachers reported that they struggled to teach in overcrowded classrooms. Just over one-fifth (21%) of middle school teachers were away⁹ from school on the day of the survey at the time of the unannounced visit of the research team. Teachers being away from school, due to any reason, aggravates the situation of too little teaching input for the child, and thus reduces what the child may gain by being enrolled in school. This is even more so when there is already a problem of shortage of teachers, as indicated by high pupil teacher ratios and reported by more than half of middle school teachers.

⁸ The high proportion of more privileged social groups among middle-school teachers was the same as among primary-school teachers.

⁹ This includes teachers who were away from school for official reasons and for personal reasons. The purpose is to highlight the level of teaching input which the child might potentially receive from the presence of the teacher.

Teaching Methods Observed

Observations of teaching methods were made in the course of the village studies. Teachers and children were conscious of being observed. The textbook is central.

Class 6, Govt Middle School, Phursania,* Farukkabad district, Uttar Pradesh:

- *The teacher was reading aloud from the Hindi text's chapter 6 titled 'Eklavya'.*
- *The children repeated the phrase or line aloud as the teacher read it.*
- *She explained the story and the meaning of the word or phrase that had been read.*
- *In between, she stopped and asked a sentence about the line read earlier.*
- *After a while she asked one of the boys sitting in the front row to read aloud from the place where she had stopped, as he seemed to be distracted. This child was able to read fluently, getting stuck in only the difficult words.*
- *Later, she called another boy, sitting in the front row, to stand in front of the class and read aloud from the textbook. This child too could read fluently.*

This method of the teacher reading aloud and the children repeating after her did not involve any comprehension of the text. Neither did the reading aloud by the two selected children. However, apart from reading aloud, the teacher also did some explaining of the text, and interspersed this with questions to the children. So, there was some limited effort to increase children's understanding and some level of interaction between teacher and students.

Class 7, Govt Middle School, Meenapur,* Hardwar district, Uttarakhand:

- *It was the Mathematics period and the teacher was teaching the concept of probability. He wrote statements on the board like "after flipping a coin one will see only the heads' side".*
- *He then explained (using an actual coin) how the statement is only partially true.*
- *The children were to copy the statements in their notebooks.*

The focus here is on children copying from the board. However, the children were fortunate that the teacher used a coin to explain the concept of probability.

Class 8, in the same school:

- *The teacher read the chapter in the Sanskrit text, explaining it line by line.*
- *Later she gave the children questions and answers to do.*
- *The teacher moved around the class and looked to see how they were getting on as the children did the question and answers.*

There is no interaction between the teacher and the students in this classroom. Children's comprehension is likely to have been quite limited, since Sanskrit is a classical language, which children reported that they found difficult.

Class 7, Government Upper Primary Sanskrit School, Rasola,* Jhunjhunu district, Rajasthan:

- *It was the Social Studies period, and the chapter was on national symbols (rashtriya prateek). The teacher was reading aloud from the book and explaining what was written using interesting examples, such as how the blue uniform worn by the Indian cricket team becomes a symbol which represents India. She actively involved the children when explaining how though there are 4 lions in the ashoka chinha (Ashoka symbol), only three are visible. She made four children get up and stand next to each other facing 4 different directions.*
- *After she finished the chapter, she spent a few minutes revising all that had been taught. The children answered the questions that she asked, together, in a chorus.*

Here, the teacher reads and explains the text. She uses lively examples which draw in the children.

*Names of villages have been changed.

In terms of feedback from parents about teachers, the picture is generally gloomy. Although some parents were appreciative (for example, a parent in Bahadurpur, Siddharth Nagar, UP and a parent in Tigariya Sancha, Dewas, MP), many more parents were critical of the level of teaching activity: “The teachers barely teach,” said a parent. A parent in Varana Khas in Tikamgarh district of MP felt there should be many more teachers, and they should be motivated and trained. In his child’s school, only one teacher worked; the others came barely 10 days in a month. The researchers found a different type of malpractice in a school in Dewas district in MP (see Box -- Copying Allowed during Annual Examinations).

Copying Allowed during Annual Examinations

The unit examinations were going on in the Government Uchch Prathmik Vidyalaya (upper primary school), in Sumeri* village in Dewas district, Madhya Pradesh. In some classes, there was open cheating. The students were making a noise and there was general chattering despite it being an exam. In fact, the researchers even saw a girl getting up, going to the teacher’s desk and looking at one of the completed exam papers submitted by a student. The girl ran back when she saw the researchers watching. All this happened when the teacher was outside the classroom. In another room, a lady teacher was monitoring the boys. She was invigilating two classes together. One of the boys sitting in the veranda had the textbook spread out in front of him and was busy copying from it. However, he was stopped after a while. The teacher took the textbook but allowed him to continue doing the examination. Later, after the exams, the children told the researchers that cheating was a very open phenomenon in the school and all the children had ‘chits’. A child even showed us his ‘chit’. Even though the official exam timings were from 12:00 noon – 3:00 p.m., the examination started at around 12:30 p.m., the children had finished between 1:30 and 2:00 p.m., and by 2:30 p.m. the school gates were locked.

The name of the village has been changed.

The overall picture leads one to conclude that although states have improved access to middle schooling, even basic infrastructural facilities like girls’ toilets, electric lights and fans, and libraries are not available in the majority of schools. Access has been expanded without the necessary infrastructural and teacher allocations, which can only have a very negative impact on the quality of school functioning, classroom activities, and finally learning outcomes. In the next section, we look at very basic learning achievements in literacy and numeracy of children enrolled in classes 6-8.

5.2.4 Low levels of learning among middle school children

Children enrolled in classes 6-8 were also asked to do the same simple tests of literacy and numeracy that were given to the children enrolled in primary school (for the tests, see Annexure 1). Table 5.4 gives the test results for children in government schools, for those enrolled in class 6, and for those enrolled in classes 7-8. Results for class 6 students indicate the level at which the students were at the end of primary school.¹⁰ They can be compared to the results of the group comprising students in classes 7-8, to see if there is a marked improvement once the child has been through one or more years of upper primary schooling.¹¹ The results for children enrolled in class 7-8 are slightly better than those for children in class 6, but not far superior. One or more years of middle schooling seem to have only a minor impact on improving basic literacy and numeracy. Looking at results for students enrolled in classes 7-8, there were some skills which the majority could do, but there was still a considerable proportion that couldn’t.

- Twenty-seven per cent of students were not able to fluently read the class 2 level text.
- Fifteen per cent could not do addition with carryover.
- About one-fourth could not correctly subtract with borrowing, multiply by two digits, or divide by five.

¹⁰Results for class 6 are likely to reflect teaching in the primary school in which the child was enrolled, and this may have been under government or private management.

¹¹ Results for the middle stage as a whole will reflect the quality of teaching in both primary and upper primary school.

The skills which students really struggled with were answering questions in sentence form, dividing by 8, and adding fractions.

- Almost sixty per cent could not answer a simple question in sentence form.
- Fifty-eight per cent could not divide by eight.
- Eighty-three per cent could not add fractions correctly.

All these skills are very basic, and the children’s inability to do these problems at this stage indicates that much more needs to be done to strengthen the schooling system right from pre-primary level, and to nourish and strengthen the child from prenatal through to school years. Without basic literacy and numeracy competencies, the middle-school child will not be able to cope with the more advanced curriculum at this stage.

Table 5.4 Literacy and numeracy competencies among children in government schools

Proportion (%) of students who could:	In class 6	In classes 7-8
Read fluently	71	73
Answer in sentence form	36	43
Add with carryover	81	85
Subtract with borrowing	66	71
Multiply with two digits	71	75
Divide by five	64	69
Divide by eight	36	42
Add fractions	11	17
No. of students who took the test	171	156

Based on a simple test (see Annexure) administered to students in their homes.

Source: Household survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

In the context of innovative ways to improve learning, SSA Tamil Nadu’s use of “Active Learning Methodology” for this stage of schooling, which builds on its programme of “Activity-Based Learning” for the primary stage, comes as a breath of fresh air (see Box – Implementing ALM in Tamil Nadu). As described, the programme was selected after very careful evaluation of its suitability to the context in Tamil Nadu.

Implementing Active Learning Methodology (ALM) in Tamil Nadu

Meera Pillai and Radha Ramaswamy

Following the success of Activity-Based Learning (ABL, discussed in Chapter 3), the SSA in Tamil Nadu began to think of extending it to the middle school level. Mr M.P. Vijayakumar, the then Director of SSA researched various options before choosing the methodology developed by an elite institution belonging to the Krishnamurti Foundation called 'The School'.

In 2003, the outreach team of The School had undertaken some serious research to build a theoretical framework for learning, based on teaching-learning practices already in place in their own school. This coalesced into a programme – *Karpavarai Thotruvipom* – which translates, minus the daring and imagination of the Tamil, to 'evolving the learner'. It is here that Mr Vijayakumar found a method for middle schools that would build on ABL. After intense preparatory work, adapting the methodology to the different content and the demands of the government school system, the first workshop on the Active Learning Methodology (ALM) for two Block Resource Teacher Educators (BRTes) from each district was organized in the last week of May 2007. By the time schools reopened in June 2007, the ALM programme was ready to be pilot tested.

According to Sumitra M. Gautama, the coordinator of The School's outreach team and the moving spirit behind bringing ALM to government schools, the methodology recognises that "good teaching does not automatically lead to good learning...The learner-based curriculum places the child's engagement with his learning at the centre and sees the teacher as a facilitator in the process." The methodology emphasizes "five essential processes for every child in the classroom:

1. Reading (underlining key words, listing and finding out meanings of words not known), and identifying the main ideas / themes in a lesson.
2. Drawing a mind map of the key perspectives.
3. Summarizing in various ways the key facts.
4. Writing the answers to questions that appear at the back of each lesson.
5. Having discussions based on the lesson in small groups.

The student therefore constructs his/her understanding and is not a passive recipient of the knowledge of the teacher."¹

The template for teacher facilitation shifts the emphasis from the *content* to the *process* of learning, which involves six principles. The teacher introduces the topic (*Introduction*), sets questions for guided reading (*Understanding*), plans, sets and supports the reinforcement activity (*Consolidation*), anchors the discussions (*Discussion*), plans and undertakes the assessment (*Assessment*) and, if necessary, designs a supporting, remedial activity (*Remediation*). All formats include writing answers to questions in the textbook and preparing for examinations. It was felt that ALM formats were necessary, at least at the initial stages, else the methodology could be too demanding on the teacher.

In practice, the following features are distinctive of ALM.

- 'The learner' is interpreted as 'every child'. ALM is designed to ensure that every child in the classroom is involved in the process of learning.
- Every child learns at her own pace. ALM provides opportunities for this.
- A variety of different skills are taught, actively learned and practised during an ALM class. This makes for student engagement and interest throughout the lesson.
- As every child learns something in every class, there is a genuine sense of achievement, confidence and pride for her in every class.
- The teacher's role is redefined as that of a facilitator -- someone still in charge, but not simply as 'giver of knowledge'. ALM helps the teacher with a basic framework to achieve this.

ALM sees academic learning as merely one "interface" of education. It also looks at "daily contexts of interaction between teachers and students and among peers" and of "academic and psychosocial enrichment activities" that go beyond the textbook. For example, teachers worked collaboratively on a child data form, and other observation formats. Compiling the data reinforces the teacher's knowledge of the child's background, strengths and constraints, and assists the teacher in choosing more sensitive and appropriate ways of interacting with the child.

Transformation in government school classrooms

Evidence from other independent evaluators, as well as our own observations in classrooms of schools managed by the Corporation of Chennai as well as in other districts suggest that both ABL and ALM have the potential to transform the classroom and make it full of engaged, interested learners. Our observations of classrooms using ALM showed a degree of engagement and class participation which we have generally ceased to associate with government schools. We were invited by the Tamil Nadu SSA to “go wherever you want” to study the implementation of ALM in the state’s middle schools further. In a class on India’s Defence Systems that we observed in Mogappair, the success of the formats of ALM was enhanced by the teacher’s creative modifications based on her intimate knowledge of her class. The class went well beyond school hours, and when the teacher gently urged them to finish quickly so they could go home, one of the boys piped up, “But we have to ask questions after this, miss!”

There is no doubt that teachers implementing the system will face challenges. For example, at a school in Kancheepuram district, the teacher took the class through all the steps of ALM. However, when a student asked for the meaning of a difficult word, she said, “This is such an easy word! Ask me another.” The teacher chose the students who would present mind maps and summaries. No questions were asked, and so there was no discussion, and finally she put up her mind map on the board, which she had prepared as a coloured chart at home. We could see how the format, which had become teacher-centric instead of learner-centric, had become soulless. Guarding against such distortions is clearly critical.

When we interviewed Sumitra Gautama, she had expressed some reservation about giving teachers a lesson format, perhaps in the fear that it might generate too much dependence on the format and kill creativity. But when she suggested to the BRTes, during the workshop, that they need not insist on a uniform format, there was immediate protest, fearing dilution of the method.

However, there are several features of the ALM experiment in Tamil Nadu which give us reason to hope:

- A keen analysis of the complexities and contradictions underlying the crisis in learning in government schools, and a willingness to acknowledge and address them.
- A strong commitment to education by the leadership in the government.
- Giving teachers and teacher educators equal ownership in the collaboration.
- A capacity to inspire teams, and offer access and problem-solving skills.
- An unwillingness to stop at the minimum and focusing on follow-ups.
- Ground-level monitoring, evaluation and support for adjustment.

At the time of the site visits for our study, the methodologies had been in place for just a year, but already a perceptible difference was reported by different stakeholders within the system. We heard a student ask a headmistress, long after the official close of the school day, “Can’t you arrange for our dinner so we can stay in school?” A teacher said, “I am due to retire next year. Now finally, I feel my life has been fulfilled. Students surround me, and touch me, as they come to get doubts cleared. They are no longer afraid.” Teachers all over the state were reporting that the dreaded Section C of the middle school question paper, which asked for summaries of lessons, was no longer left blank. Almost all students were attempting the question, and even the ones who struggled were writing two or three points.

The public-private partnership between private schools and the Corporation of Chennai, and later, the SSA, holds out hope that government schools can be places of learning. Studies have shown “[lack of] interest in studies... as the most important predictor associated with dropping out of school”.² Vimala Ramachandran spoke of the “urgent need to re-imagine literacy and education, overhaul the system and link education to life, livelihood, peace and social justice.”³ As Gautama puts it, “We see Active Learning Methodologies as the bridge that can help all young people, regardless of class or background, to feel that they are part of one world and one future. ALM is also the link between knowledge and empowerment - it equips the student with the ability to think, to apply and to discover... to negotiate the world of knowledge on his own terms, in his own way, and be a productive and fulfilled citizen.”⁴ If ALM can realise these goals, it can go far beyond being an effective pedagogic tool for the teacher in the classroom, to a vision for a new society of learners, for a new democracy. We may all have a lot riding on the success of this initiative.

¹Gautama, S. M. (2007), ALM Concept Note. Unpublished planning document. July 11.

²Choudhury, A. (2006). “Revisiting dropouts: Old issues, fresh perspectives”. *Economic and Political Weekly*. December 23. 41(51): 5257-5263.

³Ramachandran, V. (2006). “Literacy and Education”. *Economic and Political Weekly*. August 25. 41(47): 3449-3451.

⁴Gautama, S. M. (2007), ALM Concept Note. Unpublished planning document. July 11.

5.3 *More reasons why retention at middle stage is a problem*

5.3.1 *Academic demands are higher at middle stage*

A substantial proportion (53%) of class 6 teachers reported that they found students' lack of comprehension a major hurdle in their job. As children move from primary stage to middle stage, there is a significant jump in the demands that are put on them. This is linked to the fact that the curriculum is more demanding at this stage with new subjects being introduced. Each subject has a separate textbook. A third language is also introduced from class 6, and children reported struggling with English and Sanskrit, apart from the other subjects (see Box -- Language Issues).

Teachers are faced with teaching this more difficult curriculum to children, some of whom may not even have basic literacy and numeracy skills. For example, 21 per cent of the class 6 students in government schools were unable to read fluently a class-2 level text given to them (see Table 5.4). Sixty five per cent of them could not write simple answers in sentence form. There is the added anxiety due to the fact that at this stage, promotion from one grade to the next is based on examinations.

The need for study at home increases (especially given the inadequacy of teaching inputs at school), and there are differences in the extent to which boys and girls were involved in work and the amount of time they spent on study (see section 5.3.4). Before we come to that, we focus on the issue of support to the child at home in terms of direct help with their studies. This factor is a function of parents' own level of education. In the PROBE States, we found that 67 per cent of the 11-14 year olds who were enrolled in classes 6-8 didn't have a parent (father or mother) who had studied beyond class 8. Children widely expressed concern that there was no one who could help them with their studies at this level, particularly in some subjects. There were many like 13 year old Ravi (enrolled in class 6 in Ravatpur in Fatehpur district, UP) who found English and Mathematics to be the hardest subjects. Ravi said, "no one at home understands [English and Mathematics], I cannot understand the teachers' explanations, I find it difficult to follow the textbook (*ghar mein koi samajhta nahi hai, adhyaapak ke padhaane ka tarika samajh mein nahi aata, kitaab se bahut kathin lagta hai*)".

Partly as a result of the child's home environment, partly due to the poor quality of schooling at primary and middle stages,¹² and partly due to the more demanding curriculum at middle stage, the student finds that he or she is not able to cope with the curriculum. A high proportion of dropouts reported leaving school because they had lost interest in studying further, especially among boys aged 15-16 years old. Indications are that children drop out because they are discouraged by the system. At some stage, it becomes obvious to them that schooling is not likely to be of immediate benefit to them in terms of livelihood opportunities, they are not learning much, and the costs are too high.

Discouragement with the system is aggravated by failure in the annual examinations. Failure means children become overage for their grade. Being overage is more of an issue for those in the 11-14 and 15-18 age groups (compared to the 6-10 age group) as the opportunity costs of sending children to school is higher, with the need for both boys and girls to assume adult responsibilities. Failure was found to be a cause for children dropping out of school. Twenty-nine per cent of dropouts had failed before leaving. Parents were unwilling to let girls in particular continue with schooling once they had failed.

¹² Both boys and girls cited the poor quality of schooling as a reason for dropping out.

Language Issues

Anne Vaugier-Chatterjee

India's unmatched multilingualism has made it an uphill task for education policy-makers to devise a balance amongst the main languages ensuring their recognition while making it possible for pupils of different mother tongues to gain access to quality education. Constitutionally, out of the hundreds of languages and thousands of dialects, the Constitution lists 22 languages and yet another link language. This hierarchy between languages has often been criticised as a half-hearted compromise.

Since education provides the framework for language development the following questions have regularly arisen since 1947: which language would be the most appropriate in schools? How many languages should a student learn, at what stage and for how many years? Further, how relevant and valid is the mandatory trilingualism of the nation's three language formula?

Over two decades ago, the National Policy on Education (1986) emphasised the adoption of regional languages as the medium of instruction at the university stage and the need for efforts to implement the three language formula in school curricula all over the country. The formula as defined in the PoA (1992) provides for the study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages apart from Hindi in the Hindi-speaking states and of Hindi along with a regional language in non-Hindi-speaking states.

The PoA provides a brief but comprehensive assessment of the three language formula. Amongst its criticisms listed are: all languages are not being taught satisfactorily at the secondary stage, a classical language has been substituted for a modern Indian language in some states and no concrete provision exists yet for the teaching of South Indian languages in the Hindi-speaking states. The duration of compulsory study of the three languages varies and the competency levels to be achieved have not been specified.

The enduring dominance of English

The debate on the place of English has been going on unabated since Independence. It is hard to believe today that the framers of the Constitution had thought of an eradication of English fifteen years after the promulgation of the Constitution. That decision was eventually amended in 1963. English-medium schools are very much sought after by the social elite or those who want entry into the social elite through their children. There is at times an ironic discrepancy between the political nationalistic credo of the Indian elite and its choice of medium of instruction for its children. Although some state governments have attempted to gain votes by asking their State Secondary Education Boards to do away with the teaching of English as a compulsory subject in high schools, at the all-India level, the educational use of mother tongues has receded to make way for English. After English was declared the associate language of the country in 1963, the use of Indian languages, in effect, decreased. English is today not only the language of the elite within a region but also the link language among elites in the country. Criticisms of the standard of English in schools abound. Among the recurring problems one finds the lack of adequate teaching material and techniques, the neglect of grammar and the fact that English remains as formidable a tool of segregation as ever. In other words, English-medium schools essentially cater to the upper middle class from pre-school onwards and pose a severe financial problem for the less wealthy. These inequalities of chance follow the students right through university and affect their final career choices as well.

In the early 1990s, political regionalisms asserted themselves on the Indian political scene, bringing to the fore a revised reading of the vernacular / English debate. As proponents and opponents of English belong to different social groups, a solution to the language issue, it has been suggested, may lie in viewing democratisation, rather than the continuing political hegemony of an elite, as a means to nation building. However, English having evolved into being a global language this may not be easy to achieve.

Mother tongue and language of instruction: the special case of SCs / STs

The problem of mother tongue / regional language is accentuated in the case of the lower sections of society to whom an entire section of the PoA is dedicated. Since it was decided that children from tribal communities would be taught in the mother tongue in primary school, there was an urgent need for teaching learning material in the tribal languages so as to effect a smoother transition to the regional language by class three.

The matter however soon proved to be more complicated because it brought to the fore the fact that the home language of the children of SCs / STs may be different from those of others. Therefore, standard teaching learning material would have to be rewritten to make them intelligible to SC / ST children especially in areas where the standard language and the learner's dialect are different.

Experiments in this context in Karnataka, where a bilingual educational model was especially devised for tribal children, have not proved to be as encouraging as expected. A primer was prepared under the District Primary Education Program (DPEP) for the children of the Soliga tribe. The first standard Soliga primer was written in the Kannada script presuming that this would facilitate the children's reading and writing skills in the regional / state language. However, the results of this experiment were not conclusive as both the community leaders and State Project Officers expressed reservations about the need for textbooks in Soliga.

Political scientist and Dalit activist Kancha Ilaiah has explored the links between language and caste and highlighted the discrepancy between the language used in school textbooks and the language spoken at home for members of the lower castes as well as tribes. By doing so he effectively shatters the myth of the mother tongue as medium of instruction. What at school is described as mother tongue is often a language completely alien to them. Describing himself as one of the first generation to jump straight out of the jungle into school, he states the language of textbooks as not the one that his community spoke. The Telugu textbooks he argues were as alien as the English textbooks in terms of language and content. It is not merely a difference of dialect, there is a difference in the very language itself.

It is commonplace that tribal languages are endangered because viable educational systems that sustain them are not in place but other languages that are part of India's national culture when they are not defined in space through territorial boundaries are also facing the same threat.

5.3.2 *Work plays a greater role, particularly among girls*

The work demands on children at middle stage, corresponding as it does to an older age group, are considerably heavier than they are at the primary stage. The average number of hours reported by children in work-related activities (earning work and household work) was close to two hours (1.9 hours) per day for children enrolled in middle stage, double the 1 hour per day reported by children enrolled in the primary stage (see Table 5.5).

The actual work and the time involved have implications for the time children get to study at home and for whether children are able to attend school regularly. A large proportion (39%) of class 6 teachers reported that they face the problem of students attending school only irregularly. As mentioned when discussing child work among the 6-12 year olds in Chapter 4, children from economically insecure families (with parents engaged in casual labour) and farming families had heavier work responsibilities, and would be most vulnerable to irregular attendance at school, and finally to dropping out altogether.

Gender differences in terms of time spent on work are much more noticeable at upper primary stage than earlier. Pressures on girls to take on more household responsibilities, and in some cases even supplement the family's income, were higher than on boys. Among those enrolled in classes 6-8, girls reported 2.18 hours on average per day spent on work compared to boys who reported about 30 minutes less -- 1.65 hours per day (see Table 5.5).

The demands of work are likely to affect the amount of time and energy that children have for study. The time spent by boys and girls, in study outside of school hours, reflects to some extent the support that their schooling receives in their households. There were significant gender differences. Boys were spending more time in study – close to 2 hours per day on average, more than that reported by girls, which was 1.65 hours on average per day. Thus girls spend less time in study and more time on work than boys, which reflects the lower value that parents attached to girls' schooling compared to that of boys'.

Table 5.5 Time-use of children enrolled in middle stage of schooling
(hours/ day)

Time spent by enrolled children in the following activities:	Enrolled in middle stage			Enrolled in primary stage
	Male	Female	All	All
Work*	1.65	2.18	1.87	1.03
Study at home**	1.97	1.65	1.83	1.30

Notes. *Includes both housework and work which brings in income. **Includes tuition.

Source: Household survey, PROBE Revisited, 2006.

Gender differences are particularly stark when one compares the lives of boys and girls who are out of school. Girls outnumbered boys among those who had dropped out, whether during the primary stage, the middle stage, or in transition between the two. While boys cited earning work as a reason for dropping out, girls cited domestic chores. Girls were found to assume adult responsibilities at an early age (see Box -- Limited Schooling among Adolescent Girls in Rural Rajasthan).

5.3.3 *Schooling costs are much higher*

The costs of middle schooling in government schools were found to be substantially higher than that at the primary level. Parents are required to pay higher tuition fees at school, though the amounts reported were very low for those attending the "1-8 schools" and the "6-8 schools". Those in secondary schools were paying more -- ten to twenty rupees a month. Moreover, there are fewer incentives (such as mid-day meals¹³) at this stage, although some were reported -- two thirds of government school children reported receiving free textbooks and one fourth reported receiving scholarships. More books were needed at this stage and more needed to be bought. The largest share of the expenditure on middle schooling reported by households was on books and stationery (39%) followed by expenditure on uniforms (35%). There is also a greater need for private tuition at this stage with a more difficult curriculum. Private tuition accounted for just over one-tenth of the expenditure on schooling. The majority of children going for private tuition were in Bihar and UP. The distances to be travelled between home and school are greater but, on average, parents with children in government schools were spending negligible amounts on transport.

Table 5.6 Annual average costs of middle schooling, 2006
(government schools)

	(rupees)		
	Males	Females	All
Fees	109	91	101 (12)
Books / stationery	361	315	341 (39)
Uniforms	334	259	302 (35)
Tuition	113	76	98 (11)
Transport	32	14	24 (3)
Total	949	755	866 (100)

Note: Figures are based on expenditure reported by parents of a randomly-selected sub-sample of 226 boys and 168 girls who were enrolled in classes 6-8.

Source: Household survey: PROBE Resurvey, 2006.

¹³The midday meal scheme has now been extended to class 8, but this was not the case at the time of the 2006 Survey.

Limited Schooling among Adolescent Girls in Rural Rajasthan*

Anuradha De, Claire Noronha and Meera Samson

Schooling among adolescents in rural Rajasthan in 2001 was very much at a nascent stage of development, with girls lagging far behind boys. CORD surveyed 16 randomly selected villages (with schooling facilities beyond primary level) in 2001 -- only one had a school in which the highest grade was Class 10. The majority were schools that went up to Class 8. The average distance to the nearest secondary school was 7 kms!

According to NFHS-2 data, among 15-19 year olds, the median years of schooling for Rajasthani boys is eight years, but just over 2 years for girls. This striking contrast also came up in the CORD 2001 survey. The preference given to boys' schooling in rural Rajasthan was evident (see Table 1) in the high proportion of never-enrolled girls (43%, compared to 17% of boys) and low proportion of currently-enrolled girls (17%, compared to 33% of boys). The gender gap in terms of the proportion of children who have completed class 8 also stands out: only one-quarter of girls compared to one-third of boys in the 15-18 age group.

Table 1 Schooling in rural areas in Rajasthan
(15-18 age group)

Proportion (%) of 15-18 year olds:	Girls	Boys
Who was never-enrolled	43	17
Who was currently enrolled	17	33
Who completed Class 8	26	36

Source: CORD adolescent survey, 2001.

Only 3-4 teachers for the eight classes of these 1-8 upper primary schools meant that multi-grade teaching was inevitable. Teachers were quite unaccountable to the parents and the village community in general. They were frequently absent, often busy trying to get themselves transferred to other schools. Teaching appeared to be minimal. Boys in particular complained about arbitrary beating by the teacher. Bunking was frequent. Teachers were generally male and upper caste, not always sensitive to gender and caste issues. The poor quality of schooling meant that little learning took place.

Apart from a hostile schooling environment, the home environment in Rajasthan is not particularly supportive to studying, especially in the case of girls. There were considerable demands on currently-enrolled girls to be involved in work-related activities: 63 per cent of the 11-14 year olds in the sample (many enrolled in the primary stage) reported doing household work and 26 per cent reported doing economic work. On average, girls spent 1.6 hours per day working at home after school. Work demands were higher on enrolled girls in the 15-18 age group, who were relatively few in number. Parents were poor and the costs of schooling made huge demands on their budgets.

However, the benefits of schooling were obvious in the case of girls who had had some schooling. Girls who had completed at least five years of schooling were more self-confident than those who had never been to school. Schooling also offered girls protection from household and economic work – compared to the average of 1.6 hours spent daily by school-going girls, those out of school spent as much as 5.9 hours per day. Finally, school protected girls from early marriage.

*Based on a 2001 study of schooling among adolescents in four randomly selected villages in four purposively-selected districts of Rajasthan (Alwar, Barmer, Bikaner, Udaipur). In each village, all school facilities which the middle stage of schooling and beyond were surveyed, as also interviews with randomly selected households with a child in the 11-18 age group. See Samson, M., A. De and C. Noronha (2007), "Opportunities for Girls' Schooling in Rural Communities in Rajasthan and West Bengal", <http://cordindia.com/pdf/rural-adol-girls.pdf>, for more details.

The expenditure reported to be spent on boys was higher than what was spent on girls on all items of expenditure (see Table 5.6). This is an indicator of the greater importance that parents attach to boys' schooling compared to girls' schooling.¹⁴

As we end this discussion of the factors which push children out of school at the middle stage, we note that they are similar to those cited by students for dropping out during the primary stage. However, they exert a greater pressure at this stage. In addition, as in the primary stage, whether it was the direct costs of schooling or the need for the child's labour, girls were far more vulnerable to being taken out of school. Government efforts to support schooling for girls at the middle stage include the setting up of special schools with hostels for girls under the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya scheme. The state of Karnataka has been particularly successful in this respect (see Box -- Making Schooling More Accessible to Girls in Karnataka). In the next and final section of this chapter, we look at some issues around school choice at middle stage including the supply, quality and costs of private provision.

¹⁴Lower fees paid by girls in government schools (vis-à-vis boys) was because of exemptions given to girls in some cases.

Making Schooling More Accessible to Girls in Karnataka

Meera Pilai

A small qualitative study was made of the National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)* programmes of the central government implemented by Mahila Samakhya Karnataka (MSK). The aim of the study was to understand how a programme that is already committed to and has extensive experience of promoting gender equity and women's literacy can make a difference when implementing education programmes aimed at supporting disadvantaged girl students.

Community-level interventions:

Mahila Samakhya field staff carry out education-specific Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) with the communities from which the students for the NPEGEL and KGBVs are drawn, so that communities are made aware of the local education-related resources, which children are out of school, and what challenges prevent them from attending school. While identifying problems, expert facilitation encourages the communities to pay particular attention to the barriers that prevent girl children from attending school. Larger awareness campaigns called *Shikshana Arivu Andolanas*, aimed at enlisting community support to put all children in school, are held. Information sessions on the facilities and benefits of the two schemes are held for children, parents, MSK sanghas (women's groups) and panchayats. In addition, a stringent and effective community monitoring system is set up. The community in villages and slums in cities are divided into neighbourhood groups (*oni-gumpus*) of 20 houses each. For instance, there were 67 such *oni-gumpus* serving the Mudhol taluk in the villages, and 30 in the small town areas. These groups select leaders from amongst themselves, consisting of one woman and one girl who is between 14 and 18 years of age. They are responsible for ensuring that all children from that cluster of 20 houses go to school, and for helping girl children negotiate the difficulties, including family opposition, that they may face in going to school. If there are larger structural or systemic barriers, the leaders of these groups bring these to the attention of the local government, and advocate for solutions.

Family-level interventions:

MSK's community organisers make repeated visits, even in the face of stiff opposition, and sometimes, threats of violence, to families whose children are out of school to persuade them to send their children to school and help resolve the reservations and difficulties that prevent them from doing so. They also enlist the services of the local *sanghas* and key members in the community to do this. Exposure visits are provided for parents to visit the NPEGEL and KGBV programmes. For parents of children who are already in the programme, there are visits on the second Sunday of every month when parents take children out. In addition, Parents' Days are organised for them three times a year. On these occasions, there are games and fun competitions for the parents, concerns are addressed, and parents also get input sessions on various relevant topics, like legal issues (at which, for instance, age for marriage, domestic violence, etc. may be discussed), health and hygiene issues, adolescent development, etc. Parents who are resistant to sending their children to the programme are encouraged to attend on these occasions. The economic and other benefits of admitting the children to the programme are listed, and strategically, the "marketable" skills, both in marriage-related and economic terms, are highlighted to win them over.

Child-related interventions:

The MSK-facilitated KGBV and NPEGEL programmes also include regular opportunities for play. Children are taught how to cycle (as recommended in the guidelines of the NPEGEL), which improves their confidence and mobility. The girl children, most of whom were either never admitted to school, or were pulled out of school, learn karate now. This has given them opportunities for achievement and recognition: many of them have represented the school and won prizes at the district, state and national levels. Students also get a range of cultural experiences from hobby courses like painting, candle making, etc to local folk music and dances to classical dance and music. While tailoring continues to be taught, the gender stereotypes are broken by teaching the girls cycle repair, radio and TV repair, etc. as well. In an effort to inform and empower, the staff plan regular exposure visits for the girls, to the local bank, post-office, police station, courts, gram panchayat office, etc., so that children overcome the anxiety and diffidence that being female and in poverty usually generates when it comes to visiting 'official' spaces. Children are also taken to

the District Commissioner's office, where they interact with officials, especially women. Regular trainings on gender, child rights and legal issues provide students with a capacity to analyse the situations they see in their communities from human rights and socio-political perspectives. The KGBVs celebrate all religious festivals as well as the small local festivals and feasts with the special foods associated with each, so that children are not homesick at these special times. Over and above all of these, the children reported that they were really happy to have the time to study, which chores and family pressures did not allow before they joined the programme.

Teacher-related interventions:

Teachers at the MSK-facilitated KGBVs and NPEGELs take part in the gender-related trainings that are an intrinsic feature of the MSK culture. MSK maintains a viable co-operation with the other government agencies associated with education, like the BRC, DIET, the Education Department, and SSA authorities. Apart from the teachers who are deputed from the Government schools for the KGBVs, MSK appoints teachers too. MSK carries out independent assessments of teacher performance in schools run by it. However, teachers on deputation from government schools are less used to the culture of constant monitoring and accountability, and sometimes accuse MSK of "torturing" them.

Administration-related interventions:

A significant aspect of the administration of the MSK-facilitated KGBVs and NPEGELs is that there is hands-on involvement of the MSK leadership at all levels, whether of the Block Coordinator, the District Coordinators, or the State Project Director. These KGBVs do not sub-contract arrangements for board, etc of the students. They rely on a centralised procurement system set up by MSK, so that quality foodstuffs can be obtained in bulk at the most competitive prices. Cooks are drawn from the sanghas, so there is a sense of loyalty to an MSK project, and a recognition that they are working for the welfare of children in their extended community, which increases their commitment to their work. All these features contribute to considerable savings. "Whenever we go for meetings of the KGBVs, almost all the other schools complain that the funds provided by the government are insufficient. But we are able to save, and use the savings to buy our children karate uniforms and sweat suits as sports uniforms".

The MSK-facilitated KGBVs were clearly well run, and the children at these schools had rich and varied schooling experiences. The NPEGELs, as a much smaller programme, sometimes suffered a little from the fact that a single teacher was supported by MSK staff, but did not have a larger community of peers, or as much of an institutionalised framework, from within the programme as was the case with KGBV. To that extent, it meant that the programme was only as good as the person implementing it. In other words, the success of the NPEGELs depended more on the personal qualities and capacities of the individual teacher.

Other concerns were more general, not specific to the MSK-facilitated KGBVs, and related to separating children from their families and placing them in institutional care settings. The researchers raised this issue repeatedly with the students. Without hesitation or exception, the students said that they would rather be at the KGBVs than at home. They said that the range of things that they got to learn about, the amount of rest and recreation that they got at the hostel, they could not get at home. Nor could they get the support to study. As one student at a KGBV hostel in Koppal said, "Before my parents pulled me out of the village school, if my grandmother ever saw me with my books, she would get very angry, scold me and my parents, and immediately find some chore for me to do. I am so happy that no one disturbs me here when I study".

By far the two most outstanding qualities of the MSK-facilitated KGBVs and NPEGELs were that gender is not an add-on component at MSK but the *raison d'être* of the programme, and that the base of the sanghas on which MSK is built has created a culture of accountability to the poorest of the poor.

*The KGBV scheme of the central government was set up in 2004 and serves Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) in which the rural female literacy is below, and the gender gap in literacy above, the national average. Under this scheme, residential schools are set up to cater to girl children belonging primarily to Dalit, tribal, OBC and minority communities in EBBs or areas with scattered habitations. The National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) is designed to provide additional elements of support for the elementary education of girls from disadvantaged backgrounds in EBBs, urban slums, etc. These schemes are implemented through a variety of agencies, including the Mahila Samakhya.

5.4 Issues around school choice

5.4.1 Private schools with middle stage of schooling

The number of private schools with classes 6-8 constituted close to 70 per cent of all private schools in the villages surveyed. This is an indication that there is considerable demand for private schools beyond the primary stage. All these schools appear to be well established in the sense they have a total enrolment which ranged from 108 students to 250 students. But they tended to vary a great deal (see Table 5.7) in terms of the lowest class, the highest class, and the proportions enrolled in different grades.

- Four out of 67 schools catered primarily to middle stage and above. These were schools which had classes 6-8, or classes 4-10 or classes 6-10. Enrolment in grades 6-8 was a high proportion of total enrolment in these schools.
- The majority of private schools in the sample (61%) were schools where the lowest class was Nursery and the highest class 8. The average enrolment in the middle stage in these schools was 74, with approximately 25 enrolled per grade, assuming enrolment to be distributed somewhat evenly between the three grades. In these schools, and the 1-10 schools, enrolment in the middle stage formed about 30 per cent of total enrolment, and the class size was quite similar.
- In 8 schools, which are in the process of upgrading from primary to middle school, the middle stage was relatively insignificant with less than 10 per cent of their students enrolled here.

Table 5.7 Variations in private schools with classes 6-8

Grades	Enrolment in classes 6-8	Enrolment in classes 6-8 as a proportion of total enrolment (%)	Number of schools
6-8	108	100	2
4-10, 6-10	192	81.7	2
0-8, 1-8	74	31.5	41
0-10, 1-10	76	30.4	14
0-6, 0-7, 1-7	17	9.8	8
All schools with middle stage	72	46.6	67

Source: School survey, PROBE Revisited, 2006.

Feedback from parents with middle-school children in private schools

Positive Feedback:

Parents gave a number of reasons for being satisfied with the private school their child was enrolled in.

1 Accessibility

Poonam was enrolled in class 6 in an unrecognised private school in Bahadurpur, Siddharth Nagar district, UP because it was accessible, "The government school here is only till class 5, the other government school which goes upto Inter [class 10] is quite far (*yahaan par sarkaari school sirf paanch tak hain aur doosre sarkaari school jo inter tak hain, woh kaafi door hai*)".

2 Infrastructure and facilities

A very high proportion of parents with middle-school children in private schools were very happy with the infrastructure and facilities available to their children. Expectations were centred around the availability of furniture for the children to sit on, and the security and safety of children once in school.

3 Teaching

Some parents were also happy with the teaching in these schools, as, for example, parents of Ritu in class 7 in Chaktodar, Sant Ravidas Nagar district, UP. Parents of Pooja in class 7 in Belva Bai, Khushinagar district, UP were also positive about the teaching in spite of the fact that Pooja herself had complaints (see Negative Feedback below).

4 Child promoted regularly

Parents of Abdul in class 6 in Shivtar, Faizabad district, UP said they were happy with the school because their child was passing the annual examinations every year.

5 Cultural activities

Cultural activities were an important factor for the parents of Gopal enrolled in class 8 in Semri Harichand, Hoshangabad district, MP.

Negative Feedback

There were some complaints too.

1 Poor teaching and facilities

Parents of Rita had chosen to send their daughter to a private school in Shivtar, Faizabad district, UP because there was no teaching in the government school in their village. She was in class 7. However, they were not happy with that private school, "None of the teachers pay any attention; there is no place for the children to sit; in the monsoon they shut the school because the roof leaks (*sabhi adhyaapak dhyaan nahi dete; baithne ki koi vyavastha nahi hai; baarish mein school band kar dete hain kyonki chhat se paani tapakta hai*)".

Pooja in class 7 in Belva Bai, Khushinagar district, UP reported that she was struggling with English and Mathematics because "the teacher does not come every day and I don't understand what he teaches (*adhyaapak roz aate nahi hain, tatha unki padhai samajh mein nahi aati*)".

2 Beaten badly at school

Thirteen per cent of parents reported that their children (enrolled in private schools in classes 6-8) had been beaten badly in school. This figure was higher than that reported in government schools (6%).

5.4.2 Enrolment in private schools weighted towards boys and more advantaged social groups

The 2006 Survey found that at the middle stage, one-fourth of children were enrolled were in private schools, slightly higher than the proportion enrolled privately at primary level. Availability has had a role to play here. As mentioned, the majority of private schools in the sample villages had classes 6-8. The popularity of private schools at this stage was highest in Uttar Pradesh (now UP and Uttarakhand), where around 40 per cent of middle school children were enrolled in private schools. In the other states, 15 per cent or less of middle-school students were in private schools.

The high private-school enrolment in middle schooling is in spite of the high costs involved (see section 5.4.3). As at primary level, the growth of the private schooling sector has implications for both gender and social equity. Enrolment in private schools at the middle stage was higher among males (27%) than among females (20%). In terms of social groups, enrolment in private schools was highest among the privileged “general castes” (36%) followed by 26 per cent among the OBCs, 12 per cent among the SCs, and least (3%) among the STs.

Table 5.8 Enrolment in government and private schools at middle stage across social groups (6-18 age group)

	Proportions (%) of middle-school students in	
	government school	private school
All children	76	24
Girls	80	20
Boys	73	27
Scheduled Castes	88	12
Scheduled Tribes	97	3
Other Backward Classes	74	26
“General castes”	64	36
Children with illiterate parents	85	15
Children with parents who do wage labour	93	7

Source: Household survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006

5.4.3 Expenditure on private schooling – higher for boys

The household expenditure on sending a child to private school at this stage was Rs 2634 per year, close to three times as much as that being spent on sending a child to government school at this stage (Rs 888). The major item of expenditure was school fees – constituting 43 per cent of the total. Books and stationery followed at 26 per cent, and uniforms at 16 per cent. Relatively low proportions were being spent on private tuition and on transport to and from school.

As in government schools, the expenditure on private schooling of boys (Rs 2823) was reported to be higher than on girls (Rs 2257). The biggest difference reported was on school fees (Rs 1253 on males and Rs 853 on females) and on tuition (Rs 307 on males and Rs 127 on females). Thus, not only were more boys sent to private schools, they were also sent to schools with higher fees, and more was spent on additional private tuition for them.

Table 5.9 Annual average costs of middle schooling in private schools

(rupees)

	Males	Females	All
Fees	1263	853	1127 (43)
Books / stationery	667	744	693 (26)
Uniforms	419	390	409 (16)
Tuition	307	127	247 (9)
Transport	167	143	159 (6)
Total	2823	2257	2634 (100)

Note: Based on a sub-sample of 86 boys and 43 girls.

Source: Household survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

Conclusion

In the PROBE States, proportions enrolled in classes 6-8 have gone up appreciably in the decade between 1996 and 2006, but many of these children are over-age for their grade. One reason for the surge in enrolment is that access to middle schools has improved. However, it is still quite inadequate, and a substantial proportion of children continue to dropout after class 5 without enrolling in class 6, particularly girls.

The quality of government schooling at this stage, though marginally better than at the primary stage, is far from adequate. It doesn't appear that government is making the kind of investment that is required for middle schooling. Overall the resource allocation and school functioning vary greatly depending on the type of school which the upper primary grades are a part of.

Retention becomes a serious problem at the middle stage. One reason is that middle-school teachers have to cope with teaching a more advanced curriculum, and this is difficult as even basic literacy and numeracy are not assured by primary stage. Most middle-school students were also found to be unable to do slightly more advanced tasks. This is very discouraging because it reduces possible benefits of schooling for the parent and child. There is also a greater likelihood of failure in the annual examinations.

Demands on children to help their families with household chores and farm work are also higher as the children are older. Gender differences become sharper in this age group. These work demands may lead to children attending school only irregularly and exacerbate problems in coping with the curriculum, leading ultimately to the child dropping out altogether.

By the middle stage, costs of schooling for children enrolled in government schools is much higher than that at the primary stage – fees have to be paid in addition to substantial expenditure on books, stationery and uniform. Some children spend more money getting to and from school. The majority have to spend more time than at the primary stage. More children also take private tuition because parents may be unable to help them with their studies at this stage. Gender differences were visible here too. Parents of children in government schools were found to be spending more on boys than girls reflecting the greater aspirations that parents have for educating their sons vis-à-vis their daughters.

In terms of issues around school choice for the middle stage, there were a substantial number of private schools in the sample villages offering grades 6-8, and the 2006 Survey found that the private sector's share of enrolment at the middle stage is marginally higher than its share at the primary stage. As at the primary stage, private schools had a higher proportion of boys and a lower proportion of socially disadvantaged groups. The costs of private schooling at this stage were very high. As among government-school children, here too expenditure on schooling for private-school boys was higher than that for private-school girls, revealing a high level of intra-family discrimination.

It appears that while demand for upper primary schooling has grown substantially over the past decade or so, efforts to expand availability without allocating sufficient resources has meant quite a shortfall in the quality of what is available. To improve the quality of education at this stage is a great challenge, as it means successfully tackling problems both at this stage and the primary stage which feeds into it.

Chapter 6

THE ONGOING SCHOOL REVOLUTION IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

The schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh outlined in the PROBE Report is ongoing. Himachal boasts amongst the highest rates of rural children aged 6-17 years attending school in the country and the gender gap continues to narrow. These outcomes are particularly impressive given the mountainous terrain and the practical difficulties this poses to the delivery of education services. The educational experience of Himachal Pradesh is important because it demonstrates the critical role that state policy and public action play in promoting an institutional context within which universal education can become a reality. The Himachal experience holds lessons for the other states on how to improve education delivery and outcomes. It also provides a point of encouragement and reflection for policy makers and practitioners working to make education for all a reality across the nation.

6.1 Background

Tucked away in the Himalayas, the north Indian state of Himachal Pradesh has taken great strides in the past few decades. The performance of the state in health, infrastructure and other public services (e.g. supply of drinking water, electricity, telephones) has been much better than that of other north Indian states and often better than all-India averages, sometimes even comparable to better-performing states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Himachal Pradesh is also on a rapid growth path, reaping benefits of early state investment in social and economic infrastructure. At present, it ranks fourth among the more populous states in the Indian Union with respect to per capita income.¹ Table 6.1 highlights the progress in Himachal Pradesh in the past ten to fifteen years. Over the twelve-year period (1993-94 to 2005-06), the proportion of the population below the poverty line in Himachal fell from 28.4 per cent to 10 per cent of the population. The Infant Mortality Rate in Himachal declined remarkably between 1992-93 and 2005-06, and in both years it was far below the national average. Households with safe drinking water and those using electricity for lighting purposes are also proportionately much higher in Himachal than the rest of India.

Table 6.1 Progress in Himachal Pradesh

	Himachal Pradesh		India	
	1992-3*	2005-6	1992-3*	2005-6
Population (%) below poverty line	28	10	36	28
Infant Mortality Rate	56	36	79	57
Households with safe drinking water (%)	58	88	68	73

¹Himachal Pradesh planning website, <http://hpplanning.nic.in/>.

Households using electricity for lighting (%)	90	98	51	68
Proportion of women** with more than 5 years of education	39	60	28	40
Proportion of men** with more than 5 years of education	57	75	51	57

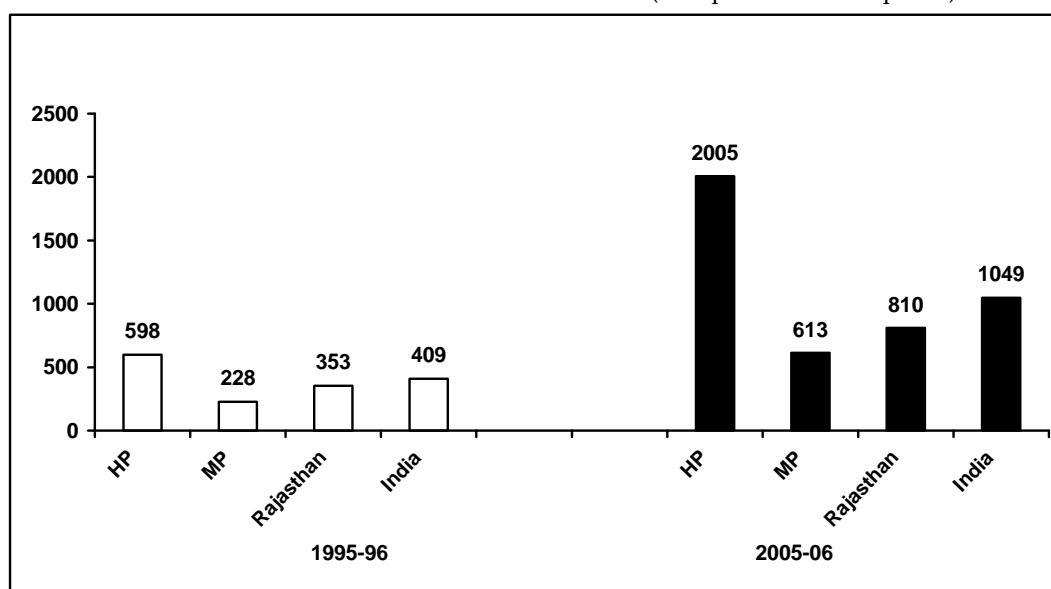
*1993-4 for poverty estimates.

**Six years and above.

Sources: Planning Commission for poverty estimates; NFHS 1 and 3 for the rest.

The progress in Himachal Pradesh has been perhaps the most impressive in the field of basic education. The high priority accorded to elementary education in the last decade is easy to see: the state government passed the "Compulsory Education Act" which came into effect from April 1998. Moreover, the state government has backed this political commitment with financial resources. The government has consistently spent a high proportion (around 7%) of NSDP (Net State Domestic Product) on education. This is in sharp contrast to the national average of less than 4 per cent. Other states like Punjab and Haryana have not prioritized the education sector to this extent. The per capita budgetary expenditure on education has also been very high in Himachal. In 1995-96, this amount (Rs 598) was one and half times the national average (Rs 409). In 2005-06, the positive differential has increased further and per capita expenditure on education is at Rs 2005, which is nearly double the national average of Rs 1049 and three to four times that of some of the PROBE States (see Fig. 6.2). The trend over the past decade indicates that prioritizing education has been maintained.

Fig. 6.2 Per capita budgetary expenditure on education
(Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and India)
(in rupees in current prices)



Source: Analysis of budgetary expenditure on education, Ministry of Human Resource Development.

The impact of high and increasing expenditure on education is visible on educational levels (see Table 6.3). While 60 per cent of the female and 75 per cent of the male population in Himachal had more than five years of education in 2005-06, this was true only for 40 per cent of the female and 57 per cent of the male population in India. It is noteworthy that the figure for males in India as a whole (57%) was lower than the corresponding figure for females in Himachal (61%).

Table 6.3 Education levels in Himachal Pradesh vs. India, 2005-06

Proportion (%) of population aged 6 years and above with:	Females		Males	
	India	Himachal	India	Himachal
No education	42	27	22	12
Less than 5 years complete	18	13	21	13
More than 5 years	40	60	57	75
Median number of years of schooling completed	1.9	4.9	4.9	7.7

Source: NFHS 3.

Household surveys from different sources (Census 2001, NSSO 2004-5, NFHS 2005-06) also suggest that Himachal is continuing with its schooling revolution. At present, the norm appears to be for children to remain in school until the age of 18 (i.e. the age at which a child is expected to complete class 12). According to data from 2005-06 (NFHS 3), 91 per cent of rural boys aged 6-17 years were attending school in Himachal, the highest in the country (higher than 89 per cent in Kerala). This is indeed a significant aspect of the continuing revolution in Himachal.

Similarly, in 2005-06, the proportion of rural girls 6-17 years attending school is 88 per cent in Himachal Pradesh. This narrow gender gap in schooling (91 per cent for boys and 88 for girls), is the second significant aspect of the continuing revolution in Himachal. The school attendance figure for girls in this age group in Himachal is a close second to Kerala (91%), higher than Tamil Nadu (80%) and much higher than the all-India figure of 63 per cent.²

Himachal Pradesh's hilly terrain and dispersed settlement have posed a major challenge to its development – in 2001, 76 per cent of its habitations had a population size of less than 1000, and 38 per cent were very small with a population of less than 250. Access to school for students and teachers is a great hurdle. Himachal Pradesh Development Report, 2003 speaks of inadequacies in road network, where hardly half the roads are metalled and tarred, and less than half the villages are connected by road. Given these challenges, the state's planned efforts to improve road infrastructure, bus services³ and village accessibility in the past decade has been especially impressive.

6.1.1 Primary education in 1996

Himachal Pradesh's remarkable progress in primary education was extensively discussed in the PROBE Report. Here it was presented as a "star" performer, in stark contrast to the PROBE States (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh). Himachal was an oasis with literacy rates in the 10-14 age group as high as 86 per cent for girls as early as 1991 (Census figures). The PROBE Survey found that the proportion of girls completing class 5 in Himachal stood at 76 per cent in 1996 (compared with just 29 per cent in the PROBE States). Proportions of 6-14 year-olds who had never-enrolled in school or had dropped out were also much lower in Himachal in 1996.

Possible explanations for the "wonder" of Himachal included official commitment, parental demand, civic co-operation and the virtuous cycle of state initiative and public response.⁴ Official commitment was reflected in the prioritization of education in expenditure budgets. Not only was a high proportion of the budget allocated to education, per capita expenditure was also higher than the national average, as mentioned earlier. Education policy was focused on improving access and retention and one of their main targets was to remove interregional inequality. The state did not attempt any short-cuts but implemented policy decisions with care.

² See Table 2.9, NFHS 3, All India Report, p. 33.

³ HP Road Transport Corporation has increased bus routes from 379 in 1974 to 1784 in 2003.

⁴ See PROBE Team (1999), pp.123-26.

The 1996 Survey also highlighted the positive parental attitude towards education at the time, both for girls and boys. The availability of government and army jobs acted as a powerful driver in demand for education. Village society was relatively egalitarian. There were collective initiatives to improve local schools, the role of parental vigilance led to greater accountability, and schools functioned even in the rural areas.

6.2 *Positive developments in Himachal, 1996-2006*

As in the 1996 Survey, the 2006 Survey in Himachal looked chiefly at the state of primary schooling,⁵ with the intention of noting changes between 1996 and 2006. The scope of the 2006 Survey was also extended to explore the state of upper primary schooling. We wished to look at what kind of gaps still existed between this state and the PROBE States as a group. This chapter relies primarily on data from the 1996 Survey and the 2006 Survey. However, in view of the small sample size,⁶ secondary data has also been used to supplement the evidence.

Given that Himachal Pradesh was approaching universal literacy (in the younger age groups) in 1996, it would be interesting to see the extent to which it has managed to maintain this impressive achievement, where the government has focused its energy in the decade 1996 to 2006, and what lessons could be learnt from its experience. The challenges it faces currently are also discussed.

6.2.1 *High and rising enrolment*

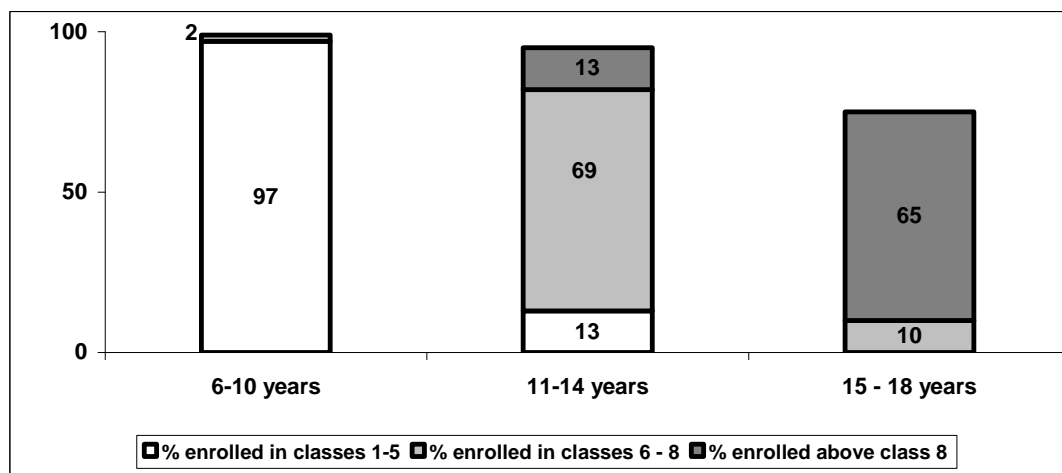
Enrolment at the primary level was close to universal even in 1996. In 2006, the survey team came across only 2 children in the 6-12 age group who had never been enrolled in school. The government is running special schemes to reach out to those children who are still out of school, including centres under the Education Guarantee Scheme in remote areas, mobile schools for the migratory Gujjar population, identification and mainstreaming of children with special needs, and home-based education for the severely disabled.

Fig. 6.4a reveals the school participation rates in different age groups, calculated from the household survey in 2006. Ninety seven per cent of 6-10 year olds were enrolled at primary level and 2 per cent in the middle stage (1 per cent were never enrolled). Among the 11-14 year olds, 69 per cent were enrolled in the middle stage and 13 per cent beyond that (13 per cent were still in primary and 5 per cent had dropped out). Among the 15-18 year olds, 65 per cent were in secondary and beyond (10 per cent were still at the middle stage and 25 per cent had dropped out). The figures indicate that Himachal has gone beyond universal elementary education and is moving towards universal secondary education.

Fig 6.4a School participation in Himachal, 2006

⁵ The same villages from the seven randomly-selected districts (Bilaspur, Chamba, Hamirpur, Kangra, Kullu, Mandi and Shimla) surveyed in 1996 were selected for the household survey in 2006. For the school survey, two neighbouring villages were chosen for each of these fourteen sample villages (similar to 1996) and all education facilities for primary and middle school education were visited.

⁶ See Chapter 1 for details.

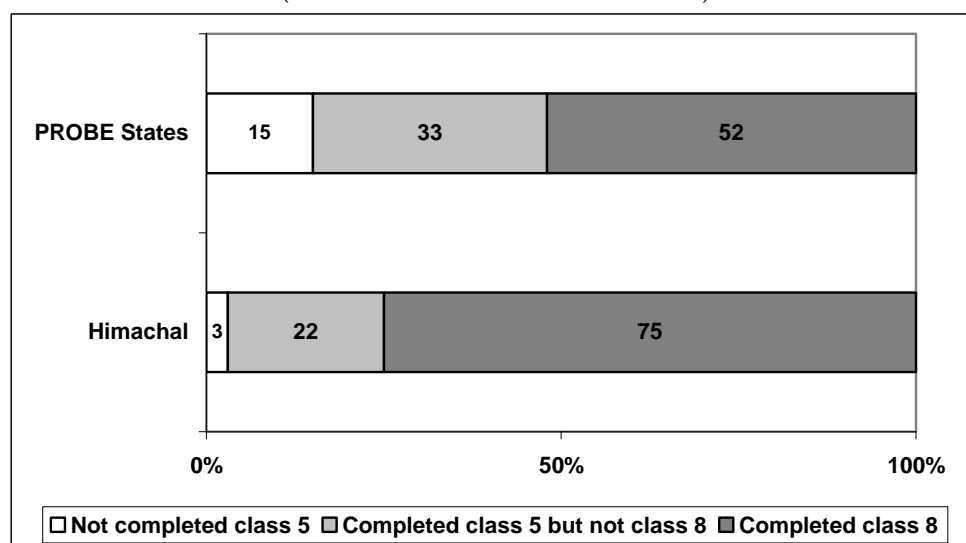


Source: Household survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

There is a stark contrast in children's progress through the schooling system in Himachal and the PROBE States. The differences come out particularly as one looks at enrolment beyond the primary stage. While 82 per cent of 11-14 year olds were in middle stage and beyond (see Fig. 6.4a), the corresponding figure in the PROBE States was only 55 per cent (see Chapter 5, section 5.1.1). Among the 15-18 year olds, while 65 per cent of those in Himachal were in secondary and above, the figure for the PROBE States was as low as 34 per cent.

Another way of highlighting the differences is to look at grades completed by the 15-18 age group in Himachal and the PROBE States (see Fig. 6.4b) the most striking differences were that close to all 15-18 year olds (97%) in Himachal had completed class 5, and three-fourths (75%) had completed class 8. In contrast, 85 per cent of the 15-18 year olds from the PROBE states were able to complete primary, and just over half (52%) had completed class 8.

Fig. 6.4b Comparing grades completed by the 15-18 age group, 2006
(Himachal Pradesh and PROBE States)



The school survey in 2006 corroborates the findings of the household survey about low levels of drop out during the primary stage. Unlike the schools in the PROBE States, where the size of Class 1 was very large and the class size diminishes sharply in later grades, the class sizes in grades 1-5 are quite uniform in Himachal. There appear to be few repetitions and failures in the primary stage. Typically, a child would start

going to school between the ages of 5 and 6, and by the time she was 11 years of age, it was highly likely that she would have completed class 5 and was studying in middle school. And, by the time she was 14, she would have completed the middle stage and joined secondary school. Dropouts were reported to be negligible.

6.2.2 Improved access to primary and middle schooling

The high demand for schooling coupled with state commitment to education has translated into a further expansion of schooling facilities. One area of “expansion” of schooling facilities has been the provision of pre-primary education by way of setting up Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centres in hamlets that did not have anganwadis, and training anganwadi workers in teaching practices. Otherwise, pre-primary classes were seen only in private schools. However, this expansion did not necessarily result in effective use of this facility. In the 2006 Survey, while 86 per cent of parents reported that the village had an anganwadi, only 29 per cent of these parents were sending their children there.

The Seventh All India Education Survey reports that, in 1999, 87 per cent of the population in Himachal had access to primary schools within a km (an increase from 76 per cent in 1993). We find that 19 per cent of the government primary schools, surveyed in 2006, were set up between 1996 and 2006. With improvements in road infrastructure and public transport, most children are able to reach school easily. It is indeed remarkable that in a state with a dispersed settlement pattern like Himachal Pradesh, nearly 90 per cent of the parents of primary level children said that the school was less than 30 minutes away. The average time reported to get to school was only 20 minutes.

There has been expansion in upper primary schooling facilities as well. In the 39 villages covered in the 2006 Survey, there were 18 schools which offered upper primary education – nine of them were established after 1996. Unlike the pattern in some of the PROBE States, middle schools are not upgraded from primary schools but set up as separate schools – with classes 6-8 only. This is also different from the earlier pattern in Himachal, where upper primary classes were part of secondary schools as seen from the seven 6-10 and 6-12 schools in the sample villages. Interviews with students and their families reveal that 30 per cent of the sample children went to a school in the neighbouring village, and that their commuting time varied from 30 to 60 minutes.

6.2.3 Increased teacher recruitment

Secondary data suggest that the growth in child population in Himachal has slowed down. As a result of the decline in population of children below 6, which started in the nineties, one can expect a decrease by 2006 in the number of children in the 6-12 age group, and a consequent decrease in the numbers of children enrolled in primary stage.⁷ According to Selected Educational Statistics, the number of students enrolled at primary stage declined from 694,400 in 1998 to 676,200 in 2006 (Table 6.5). However the number of teachers appointed increased from 23,200 to 30,500 in the same period. This resulted in a fall in the pupil teacher ratio (PTR) at primary stage (from 29 to 22 between 1998 and 2006). At middle stage, enrolment increased from 351,500 to 405,600 in this period, but proportionately more teachers were recruited (numbers went up from 5,600 to 12,000) and so here too the PTR dropped (from 19 to 15 between 1998 and 2006).

Table 6.5 Changes in student enrolment and teachers employed
(government schools in Himachal)
(in '000)

	1998	2006
Primary stage:		

⁷ The 1996 PROBE Survey had found that there was near universal participation in primary schools in Himachal.

Enrolment	694.4	676.2
Teachers	23.2	30.5
Middle stage:		
Enrolment	351.5	405.6
Teachers	5.6	12.0

Source: Selected Education Statistics, relevant years, MHRD.

The decline in pupil teacher ratios at primary stage was also apparent from the 1996 and 2006 Surveys. These surveys found the PTR at primary stage in Himachal had declined from 27 in 1996 to 19 in 2006. The 2006 Survey, which also focused on the upper primary stage, found that the PTR at this stage was as low as 12. In terms of teacher allocations, it was found that about half the primary schools had one or two teachers in 2006. The schools with upper primary grades appeared to be better staffed -- the 6-8 schools had 4 or more teachers, the 6-10/6-12 schools had 8 or more teachers. The average enrolment at middle stage was lower in the 6-8 middle schools, and higher in the secondary and senior secondary schools (see Table 6.6), indicating that the latter schools which had been set up earlier are more accessible and in demand. The middle schools had a larger average enrolment per class than the primary schools: the average enrolment per class in the middle stage is 27, whereas the average enrolment per class in the primary stage is 11.

Table 6.6 Government schools at primary and middle stage in Himachal, 2006

	Primary stage	Middle stage		
	Primary schools	Upper primary schools	Secondary / senior secondary schools*	All schools with middle stage*
	1-5	6-8	6-10 / 6-12	6-8 /6-10/6-12
Number of schools**	43	10	6	16
Average enrolment	55	60	120	82

*In these schools, enrolment applies to grades 6-8 only.

**Schools for which enrolment data is available.

Source: School survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

There are some striking differences between Himachal and the PROBE States not only in terms of teacher availability, but also teacher profile – this has both positive and negative implications. To begin with, the 2006 Survey found very few para teachers: 85 per cent of teachers in primary schools were regular teachers. Unlike the PROBE States, the majority (62%) of primary level teachers (regular and para teachers taken together) were women. This preference for female primary teachers was not a recent phenomenon, as more than half of the female teachers were found to have more than 15 years of teaching experience. Education levels of primary school teachers in Himachal were low compared to the PROBE States – nearly half of them had completed class 10 or less. This was especially true for older teachers. However, the majority (72%) had Junior Basic Training (JBT) and very few (less than 5%) did not have any pre-service training. The teachers at middle school stage were primarily male (71%) and upper caste (74%). The majority were in their thirties (men and women) and had done their B.Ed. (regular teacher training degree). There was little indication that contract teachers with little training are being appointed at this stage.

Contract Teachers in Himachal Pradesh

There have been controversies in Himachal regarding diluted recruitment norms for contract (includes PTA-appointed) teachers and the practice of regularization. The earliest variant of the para-teacher scheme was the "Voluntary Teachers Scheme" in Himachal Pradesh in 1984. In 1991, around half of them who had completed five years of service and 90 days of training were converted into regular teachers. The scheme was discontinued after 1992 due to litigation. In 1998, the scheme was re-introduced with different guidelines as Vidya Upasak Yojna. In 2004, the government decided to regularise those teachers who had completed eight years of teaching. Currently, the state recruits teachers under the Primary Assistant Teacher Scheme. The Parent Teacher Associations have been given the freedom to appoint teachers. The process of recruiting contract teachers has been criticized as "backdoor entry" into government service. It is a break from the past when trained and qualified teachers were recruited systematically from those registered with the government for regular teaching jobs.

6.2.4 Better infrastructure

School infrastructure in Himachal Pradesh in 1996 was not much better than that in the PROBE States. The 2006 Survey in Himachal found that there has been a huge improvement on this front. In the case of provision of drinking water, electricity and kitchen sheds, the improvement has been greater for Himachal than the PROBE States. In Himachal, 93 per cent, 66 per cent and 69 per cent of schools, respectively, had these facilities (Table 6.7). The facilities available in Himachal were generally functional, but there were gaps. For example, 93 per cent of schools had been provided with at least 2 all-weather rooms, but they were found to be functional in only 77 per cent of schools. There was also a gap in the case of toilets -- only 59 per cent of schools had toilets available and a much lower proportion (36%) had them in functional condition. Library facilities were also acutely deficient.

Table 6.7 Infrastructure in government primary schools in Himachal, 2006

Proportion of schools with:	Available	Functional
Blackboard in every class	96	89
At least 2 all-weather rooms	93	77
Drinking water facilities	93	82
Kitchen shed	69	61
Electric lights	66	57
Toilet	59	36
Girls' toilet	32	18
Library	20	16

Source: School survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

6.2.5 Decline in costs of schooling for parents

Government interventions have not been confined to improving the supply of schooling facilities. There have also been measures to boost the demand for education through different incentives: not only were all students given free text books, but also free writing material, and girls were provided free uniforms. The midday meal scheme in Himachal was also very regular – 96 per cent schools reported providing the midday meal. This matched with what was reported by parents and children.

All these efforts have led to a decline in costs of education (at constant prices) for parents. As seen from Table 6.8, the 2006 Survey found that schooling costs at the primary stage in government schools in Himachal are Rs 623 (per child per year). In 1996-7 prices, this works out to be Rs 384 per child per year, a considerable decline from school costs in 1996, which were Rs 492 per child per year. The bulk of the expenditure in 2006 went to books and stationery (48%). Uniforms took up 40 per cent with school fees taking up the remaining 12 per cent. No parent reported spending any money on private tuition or transport

In both 1996 and 2006, the costs of schooling in Himachal (based on parents' expenditure) were higher than that reported in the PROBE States -- Rs 492 vs. Rs 318 in 1996, and Rs 623 vs. Rs 454 in 2006, in current prices.

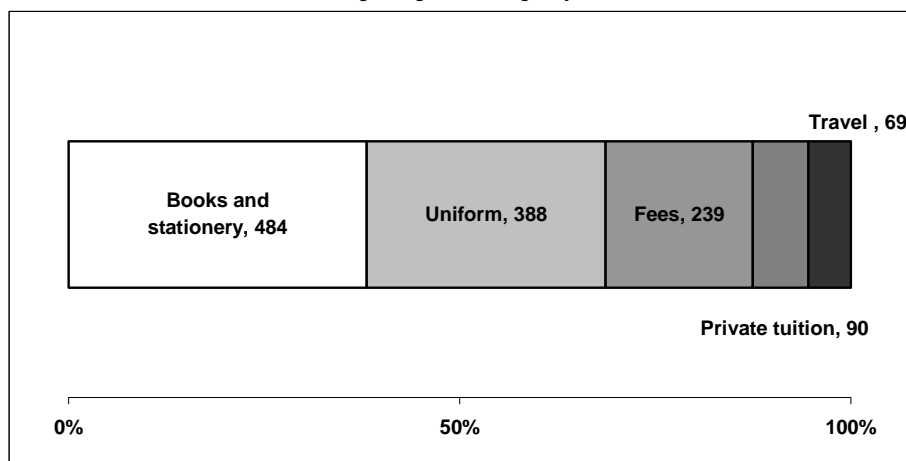
Table 6.8 Costs of government schooling at primary stage
(Rs / child / year)

	1996 (current prices)	2006 (current prices)	2006 (1996-7 prices)
Himachal Pradesh	492	623	384
PROBE States	318	454	280

Source: Household surveys: PROBE, 1996; PROBE Revisited, 2006.

The 2006 Survey also collected data on costs of schooling at upper primary stage. Parents reported that the annual expenditure on a child studying in middle stage was Rs 1270, double that incurred for a child in primary stage. Expenditure on all items was higher than at primary stage, on all items of expenditure. Fig. 6.8b gives the item-wise expenditure in rupees per child per year. At this stage, there is some expenditure on school fees, private tuition and travel. But similar to the primary stage, the bulk of expenditure was on books and stationery and uniform. At middle stage this is 38 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively.

Fig. 6.8b Item-wise costs of government schooling at middle stage in Himachal, 2006
(in rupees per child per year)



6.2.6 High student attendance

We noted in Chapter 4 that enrolment rates had improved considerably in the PROBE States but that universal primary education remains a distant goal in these states because attendance rates had not kept pace with enrolment. Attendance in the PROBE States was low, with only two-thirds of those enrolled being marked present in the register on the first day of the survey; observed attendance was still lower.

Himachal Pradesh is refreshingly different, again. Attendance marked in the register stood at 92 per cent and there was closer correspondence between observed attendance and marked attendance. This is not so surprising given the low pupil teacher ratio and the fact that active teaching was observed in at least two-thirds of the schools. The schools were typically small, and hence rarely had five teachers for the five primary classes. On average, there were 3 teachers per school and multi-grade teaching was common. But they had fewer children to handle and it was possible for them to give children more individual attention, and keep track of child absenteeism.

High rates of school attendance are a reflection of not only better teaching activities in Himachal (compared to the PROBE States) but also of the parents' enthusiasm for their child's education as well as the child's own enjoyment of the schooling experience. To begin with, children did not feel they had any choice about schooling. Going to school was a well-accepted social norm. In addition, the fact that 98 per cent of children interviewed enjoyed going to school speaks positively of the schools they attended.

The child's enthusiasm for school was amply reflected in their interviews: they had dreams of studying till higher classes and aspired to become policemen, scientists and teachers. Zainam, a Class 2 child from Sahu Padhar, Chamba district whose illiterate parents run a shop said "I'll study more and become a teacher (*aage padhkar miss banoongi*)". Meenu in class 4 wanted to study because her sister was studying. Kajal too wanted to study because her brother was studying and was very happy with her teachers.

Dikshika enrolled in class 7 in Senior Secondary School in Sahoo, Chamba had an additional reason why she liked to go to school – "If one stays at home, one has to do some housework, which is why it is fun going to school (*ghar mein rehne se kuchh kaam karna padhta hai, isliye school mein jaane mein maza aata hai*)".

Schooling being an accepted norm, coupled with the enthusiasm of both the child and the parents, has translated into – as discussed in the beginning – high attendance even among the older children. This was in spite of high schooling costs at this stage. The norm in Himachal Pradesh has come to be at least ten years of schooling – much ahead of the more recent shift in policy to universalisation of secondary education.

Use of Teaching-learning Aids in Mandi District

Teaching-learning aids are very useful when teaching young children. The researchers witnessed effective use of such aids in a Himachali village (which was selected for the purpose of a village study). The Class 1 teacher in the government primary school distributed flashcards among the 6 children in her class, who rushed towards her to take them. These flash cards consisted of pieces of colourful cardboard on each of which a number was written in numeral, in Hindi and in English. It was also represented pictorially -- objects (like apples) were drawn on the cardboard to represent the number. This simply-made teaching aid was effective in communicating to the children different aspects of a numeral. The teacher made sure that all the children had at least 2-3 of these flashcards. Then she asked the children, "Who has the number 3?" The children looked eagerly through their flashcards to see if they had the number the teacher had called out and the child with the flashcard "3" stood up and showed the card to the rest of the class. The teacher continued this exercise for a while with numbers and then did the same with the alphabet flash cards. The children were very excited and enjoyed this activity a lot.



The children showing the flashcard to the class

Another example of the use of teaching learning aids came from a multi-grade classroom in the same school, with classes 2, 4 and 5. The teacher used teaching learning aids to manage the three different classes. Class 2 was asked to copy the list of vowels (*barahkhar*) from the chart hanging on the wall. They did this in a focused manner. This helped the teacher to teach the children in classes 4 and 5.



Referring to the chart

6.2.7 *Rising parental motivation*

"It is the duty of the parents to teach their children," said Prem Lata from Bharathu village (Bilaspur district). This statement summarizes Himachali parents' attitudes towards schooling for their children. The high motivation of parents is well established from the 1996 Survey as well as other studies. The 2006 Survey establishes the continuation of this motivation, and even reflects a rise in it. A number of factors seem to contribute to this continuing high motivation, as evident from observations and parents' interviews during the survey.

Most parents want their children to study "as far as possible" or "as long as the child is capable" (83 per cent for boys and 72 per cent for girls, see Table 6.9). The corresponding figures were much lower for parents in

the PROBE States (69 per cent for boys and 52 per cent for girls). Demand for education of boys is higher in both Himachal and the PROBE States, with the gender gap in aspirations being greater in the PROBE States.

Table 6.9 Parents' aspirations for boys and girls, 2006
(enrolled children, 6-12 age group)

Proportion (%) of parents who wish to:	Himachal	PROBE States
Educate "as far as possible" / "as long as the child is capable"		
Boys	83	69
Girls	72	52
Educate upto class 12 or more		
Boys	14	17
Girls	19	14
Educate upto class 10		
Boys	3	9
Girls	9	14
Educate till less than class 10		
Boys	0	5
Girls	0	20

Source: Household survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

This positive attitude of the parents towards their child's education and towards the teachers is, no doubt, reinforced when their children enjoy their schooling experience. "The teacher loves us and teaches us well (*teacher hamein pyaar karti hain, achchha padhaati hain*)", said Neha enrolled in Class 4 in Sahu Padhar, Chamba. Hardly any parent reported the child being beaten badly at school. And even illiterate parents who knew little about the school appreciated their children's involvement with education and made encouraging comments. Most parents of enrolled children in Himachal Pradesh do come from advantaged background compared to the PROBE States. Parents of only 10 per cent of the children in Himachal were both illiterate compared to one-third in the latter. The parents are also relatively better off -- only one-tenth were children of casual labour while one-third were children of salaried workers, a sharp contrast to their counterparts in the PROBE States where the proportions are exactly the reverse). So parents are better able to support their children's education, be it paying for necessary schooling expenses or helping them with their school work.

Table 6.10 Parents' educational levels and occupations, 2006
(children in 6-12 age group in government schools)

Proportion of children (%) with:	Himachal	PROBE States
Both parents illiterate	10	36
Father literate	88	60
Mother literate	72	28
Main family occupation:		
Casual labour	10	32
Salaried jobs	33	10
Help at home with schoolwork	69	48

Source: Household survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

Parents cited a variety of reasons for educating their children. There were the usual responses regarding how boys would get a better job and girls would get better homes when they got married. There were also other reasons cited that included "getting respect in society", "ability to discern good and bad", being a "better person", developing simple life skills (like adding and subtracting, making phone calls, writing letters in times of distress), distinguishing right from wrong and lastly, yet very significantly, because it is now the social norm ("*padhai ka zamaana*").

6.2.8 *Education committees play a significant role*

Another significant feature of the schooling system in Himachal, especially in comparison with the PROBE States, is the presence of strong and functioning community organizations. In the 1996 Survey, community action was seen to play a very positive role in Himachal's schooling revolution, but not through formal channels. In 2006, we found formal education committees making a significant contribution towards schooling. Through government efforts, Shakti groups, which focus on girls' education and balwadis / anganwadis had also been set up.

A number of observations made during the 2006 Survey reveal that for the majority of schools covered, these organizations are not only in place, but also active. The VECs and PTAs were generally reported to be active in construction activities: building, repair and maintenance. Appointing new teachers was also mentioned as their responsibility by some committees. In this they played a similar role to that of some VECs and PTAs in the PROBE States. A few schools in Himachal reported that committees monitored attendance of children and the functioning of the school, which was not reported in the PROBE States. Nearly all schools in Himachal also had a Mother Teacher Association (or "*mata* committee", as it is commonly known), which took primary responsibility for the midday meal scheme. Some of the PTAs and MTAs were involved in helping to organize cultural events at the school (see Box).

Community Contributions to Better Infrastructure in Schools

In these schools parents and the panchayat were contributing to improvements in infrastructure and facilities. In the higher secondary school in Sahoo, Chamba, parents had helped in constructing and painting the school building. The school was given a computer by the panchayat. The panchayat in Kamladi, Chamba had helped in extending the school grounds and constructing a gate for the senior secondary school. In the secondary school in the same village, parents spoke of an active PTA which was working on providing a playground for the school. A middle school PTA was getting the flooring and woodwork done for the school. Parents in a primary school were donating free labour towards the construction work.

The positive attitude of parents towards schooling and a tradition of informal community action towards better schooling (as evident even in the 1996 Survey) have contributed to the prominent and effective role that education committees played in enhancing schooling in Himachal Pradesh. However, there were also villages where teachers felt these committees were not making a significant contribution (see Box – Disharmony between Teachers and School Committees), which indicates that there are tensions because of shifts in the balance of power within the school.

Disharmony between Teachers and School Committees

It was a "model" senior secondary boys' school with a two-storied building, a large compound, including a basketball court and a beautiful view of the mountains. The school started at 10 o'clock on a winter morning. The school had twelve teachers appointed, and all were present. At first glance, the infrastructure seemed to be quite good. It had a number of *pakka* rooms (each with nice blackboards, charts and other teaching material), a large enough library, drinking water facilities, and a big play area. But what was highly disappointing was the fact that such a big school did not have any toilet facilities for the students.

The recent decentralization policy has altered the power structure in the school. Earlier teachers enjoyed a monopoly. But in the present system, parents have been given more power than they had earlier. Whether the education committees were really active, was still a question. Teachers alleged that neither the VEC nor the PTA seemed to function properly. The members only attended meetings and did not do anything fruitful at all. Teachers felt that the distance between them and the parent community in general was growing. Parents and others in the village believed that the government had provided incentives to the school for the children, and that the teachers were not distributing them properly.

Based on a visit to Government Model Senior Secondary School, in a village in Chamba district.

6.3 *Challenges facing government schools*

Himachal can boast of considerable successes. The 2006 Survey indicates that up to elementary level there is education for all. While the base is quite set in terms of provision of well-endowed state schools and in terms of high and regular student attendance, some problems persist, and we discuss these in the subsequent sections.

6.3.1 *Teaching activity*

Only three fourths (74%) of teachers teaching classes 1-5 were in school⁸ at the time of the team's unannounced visit during the 2006 Survey. The situation was the same for teachers teaching classes 6-8. In this context, the situation in Himachal was slightly worse than in the PROBE States.

With the dispersed pattern of habitation in Himachal Pradesh, in order to ensure access, schools were established even in areas with only a few children. One-tenth of the primary schools had only one teacher appointed, though there were attempts to ensure that at least 2 teachers are appointed to each school. In addition to the 10 per cent of schools where only one teacher had been appointed, another 25 per cent were functioning as single-teacher schools (all but one teacher absent) on the day of the survey.

Primary schools had low enrolment. Single-teacher schools were functional, as the task of keeping children usefully occupied was much easier than in schools with high enrolment. Nevertheless, it did reduce the possibility of each child receiving input suitable to his/her age and level of competence.

Time spent by teachers in active teaching is another area of concern. When the investigators arrived unannounced, there was no teaching activity in one-third of the schools. While this is better than the PROBE States (where nearly half of all surveyed schools had no teaching activity at the time of the unannounced visit), it is still high. The sizeable proportion of schools without active teaching in Himachal Pradesh could be linked with the fact that nearly one-fifth of the schools did not have a head teacher in place. Time spent in active teaching critically impacts how children cope with the curriculum for each grade. In the next section we discuss whether children in classes 4-5 and 6-8 had mastered basic literacy and numeracy.

⁸ Teachers were recorded as missing from school even if away on official work.

The 2006 Survey found that parents in Himachal had had more schooling than those in the PROBE States. Many took a keen interest in teaching their children at home. They were grateful to the teachers for teaching well, because they felt they could not manage their children's schooling otherwise.

Primary level

Parents and children were generally positive about the facilities in school, and about the attention that the teachers paid to their job. Shalu (45, mother of a class-5 girl) commended government schools, "The government is providing a lot of opportunities (*sarkaar bahut suvidhaayen de rahi hain*)". A parent in Uperi Baheli, Mandi said, "all [my] children were educated in government schools. They have been taught very well (*saare bacchchon ne sarkari school mein padhai ki hai. Unhen achchhi tarah se padhaaya gaya hai*)". Things were a little different with the middle school in Larot, Shimla where parents were happy with the teaching, but felt the school needed more rooms, more benches, and that there should be a toilet.

Even illiterate parents who knew little about the school appreciated their children's involvement with education. Shanti Devi said, "We are illiterate and have learnt about the word 'school' only after our children started attending it. Our children are good in studies, which means the teacher has taught them well (*ham anpadh hain. jab se bachchen school jaane lage tab se "school" shabd ko janne lage ham. Hamare bacche padhne mein tez hain, isse pata chalta hai ki adhyaapak ne inko achhe se padhaaya hai*)". Teerthram held the view that "The teacher is from our own village; so, whatever he does will be for the better (*gaav ke hi adhyaapak hain, jo bhi karenge achchha hi karenge*)". Sunita Devi does not know much about the school but said, "The child recites numbers etc. at home, so it seems that the teacher teaches (*bachcha ghar mein ginti vagerah sunaata hai. Isliye lagta hai ki adhyaapak padhaate hain*)". She found her child to be happy with the school and the teacher and always talking about his Sir. Such positive feedback was a distinguishing aspect of Himachal Pradesh.

However, Himachali parents also expressed their desire for more from the schooling system. To some extent this could be a reflection of the fact that most parents had completed secondary education.

"The shortage of teachers should be addressed and teachers should be skilled in teaching (*teacheron ki kami poori honi chahiye aur unhe achchhi tarah padhaana aana chaahiye*)", said a mother.

Aarti Devi, mother of a 7-year old girl, said, "[the teacher] doesn't pay attention to the students and does not check their notebooks properly (*bachchon pe dhyaan nahi dete, aur na hi sahi tarike se copy jaanchi jaati hai*)". She was not happy that all the teachers were female.

Kiran Devi, whose child studies in class 3, said, "[teachers] don't teach well, and their results aren't good either (*achchha nahi padhaati aur result bhi kharaab aata hai*)".

Taale Ram's son Aashin, in Class 2, enjoys going to school and thinks his teachers teach well. Taale Ram does not agree: "Teachers come to school irregularly. Children are left on their own. Teachers also don't teach well...The school should get new teachers (*school bahut kam aate hain. bacchen school mein akele hi rehte hain. achchha bhi nahi padhaate hain...nayey adhyaapak aane chaahiye*)".

Kishori Lal, a parent of a girl in Class 3, felt teachers would be more accountable if there were 2-3 visits a month to check on them. He also felt local teachers were not accountable.

There were a few complaints of rank negligence similar to those in the PROBE States.

One young girl mentioned how her Hindi teacher sat outside the class and did not teach.

Asha Devi, whose son is in Class 2, said, "Teachers do not come to school every day. They take turns to come to school. Only one teacher stays at a time. He/she comes alone for 10 days at a time. They spend more time in other employment. They come to school rarely (*adhyaapak roz school nahi aate hain. Baari baari se aate hain. keval ek hi rehte hain. 10 din mein 1 aate hain. apna anya rozgaar zyaada karte hain. school kam aate hain*).

Upper Primary Level

It seems that most of the complaints were related to the primary schools, and almost all feedback pertaining to the middle, secondary and senior secondary schools were largely positive. These schools appeared to be well-staffed with teachers who took their duties seriously. Parents of these schools typically said that all the teachers were qualified and experienced and taught well.

Sushant in class 8 in a secondary school near Mihal, Chamba was given regular class tests and his parents were called to be given the results.

Bharat in class 8 in a secondary school in Ner, Mandi reported that if any homework was given, the teachers asked for the notebooks and checked them the very next day.

Babita's parents from Bharatu, Bilaspur were pleased with the attention the teachers paid to the child. Parents with a child enrolled in the secondary school in Batran, Hamirpur praised the teacher for the way he ensured discipline in the school.

The secondary and senior secondary schools had the best facilities in terms of musical instruments and sports equipment. The children reported that they played football and kabaddi in the school. There were facilities to play badminton, volleyball and cricket. One parent said their child's school had a library from where children were allowed to borrow books for a day. Although the middle schools were less equipped, parents were happy with their functioning and wished that these schools could be extended to secondary schools. Parents were particularly happy that the teachers did not beat the children too much.

Children often mentioned they found English difficult – they could not understand the textbook. They did not know how to write answers to the questions. Children were also struggling with Mathematics. Some teachers were reported not to teach these subjects properly. This feedback came primarily from students and parents enrolled in secondary and senior secondary schools. This complaint regarding English and Mathematics also came also from parents and students in the PROBE States.

6.3.2 Learning achievements

The Himachal Pradesh sample of currently enrolled children who were tested is quite small. Based on this small sample, we cannot draw any significant inferences about learning outcomes. The results of the tests conducted are presented below in Table 6.11.

Table 6.11 Learning Achievements in Himachal Pradesh
(government schools)

Number of children:	Classes 4-5	Classes 6-8
Who can read fluently	7	15
Who can add	16	20
Who can divide by 5	9	14
Number of children tested	18	20

Note: Based on a simple test. See Annexure 1.

Source: Household survey: PROBE Revisited, 2006.

The results are discouraging. Eleven of the eighteen children in classes 4-5 could not read a Class 2 text fluently. While 16 out of 18 children could add, only 9 could divide by 5. Results were better for the students enrolled in upper primary grades (out of 20 children tested, 15 could read fluently, all could add, and 14 could divide by 5), but basic literacy and numeracy skills should have been within every child's grasp at middle stage.

Results in the annual examinations⁹ also suggest a need to improve the quality of learning in schools. While the pass percentage at the primary level in 2006 was reported to be 97 per cent, the proportion who passed class 5 with more than 60 per cent was reported to be only 54 per cent. The pass percentage at class 8 was relatively high at 79 per cent, but the proportion who passed class 8 with more than 60 per cent was limited to 22 per cent.

The results from the Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER)¹⁰ are far more positive. They suggest that Himachali children often lie in the top bracket as far as learning achievements are concerned.¹¹ Certainly, government schooling at both primary and upper primary levels in Himachal Pradesh is far ahead of that in PROBE States on all counts.

6.3.3 Greater role of private schooling

Private schooling has grown substantially in urban areas in the last decade, where the density of population allows such schools to be a feasible proposition economically. But they are playing a significant role even in rural areas. Although only 16 per cent of children in the 6-12 age group in Himachal Pradesh were enrolled in private schools, the proportion was much higher than in 1996 when only 5 per cent of this age group were enrolled.

In Himachal, there were many parents who praised the teaching and facilities in government schools (see Box – Parents and Students on Government Schooling at Primary and Upper Primary Levels). The low fees and incentives of government schools were also appreciated by the relatively poor families. A sharp contrast between parents in Himachal and the PROBE States was seen from comparisons of responses to the question, "If costs of education remained the same, would you prefer to send your child to a government or private

⁹Source: Government documents.

¹⁰ The ASER Surveys are undertaken annually and focus on measuring children's learning outcomes.

¹¹See Annual Status of Education Report (Rural), 2007.

school?” Nearly half of the Himachali parents opted for government schools – much higher than the 30 per cent who said so in the PROBE States.

The private schools that are being patronized by rural parents in Himachal appear to be somewhat different from private schools that have come up in the PROBE States. Their fees were not low – in the sample households in Himachal, parents of the few private-school children reported spending nearly Rs 5000 annually, on average. Not many villages had a private school and many of those enrolled in private schools had to travel outside the village. This added to their expenditure in terms of time and money.

Anjana Devi of Ner, Mandi sends her daughter (Class 5) to a local government primary school. Her six-year-old son, who used to go to this school, was shifted to a private school. The reason given by her was that the daughter was clever and the son wasn't, so he needed the special input of a private school. However, in response to whether or not she would send her daughter to a private school, she said, “How can one bear so much expense? (*itna kharcha kaun uthaayega*)”. Thus, in a situation of limited resources, gender is seen to play a role. This was also apparent in the PROBE States.

Shivani, on the other hand, felt that girls and boys had an equal right to study, and both should study and try and get good jobs. She sent her children to private schools because children are not taught well in government schools, particularly English. However, she also felt that teachers do not come on time and that English should be taught more in her children's school. Her son Abhishek wanted to become a doctor. She would like a good English-medium school in the village.

Mixed Perceptions of Parents on Private Schooling

“I had a desire to send the children to a private school; the teaching is good there (*private school mein bachchon ko padhaane ki tamanna thi, vahaan padhai badhiya hoti hai*)” said Narpal Singh, 27 years, with a permanent job. While he felt that the teachers taught well, Narpal also commented, “The school just about functions. The facilities should be commensurate with the fees charged (*kisi tarah se sab kuchh chal raha hai. fees ke mutaabik behtar suvidhaayen milni chaahiye*)”.

Deepak (aged 33 and self-employed) preferred a private school at the pre-school level. He said, “When we send children to an anganwadi clean and tidy, they get covered in dust and dirt there. So we don't send them (*anganwadi mein bacchon ko saaf banaakar bhejte hain, vahan bachchen dhool mitti se gande ho jaate hain, isliye nahi bhejte hain*)”.

Kiran, mother of Bhanu, was satisfied with her son's private school. However, she felt that “[not so good] in comparison to the city ones... no water or electricity; facilities should be good, teachers should be experienced (*sheher ke apeksha...bijli aur pankhe nahi hain; facility theek honi chaahiye, anubhavi adhyaapak hone chahiye*)”.

Conclusion

The schooling scenario in Himachal in 2006 reflects a somewhat brighter picture than in the PROBE States, as it did in 1996. Here the “system works”. The problems in the PROBE States exist here too but to a lesser extent. Even though pupil teacher ratios are low, and parents are very alert about school functioning, the 2006 Survey did find schools without active teaching. There were also gaps in children's learning. This worrisome aspect of schooling in Himachal is reflected in the fact that in spite of political will backed by resources, the pass percentage at secondary level is around 60 per cent. This means 40 per cent of the students have to repeat class 10 in order to continue to the senior secondary stage. The education department has to grapple with accountability issues, and a difficult terrain, remote habitations and small schools in much of Himachal, make the task more difficult.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

The last chapter of the PROBE Report was “Change is Possible”. In many ways, this assertion has come true. Much has indeed changed – for the better – in the schooling system during the ten years between the two surveys (1996-2006). The recent surge in school participation is one outcome of these positive changes. Who would have thought, ten years ago, that 95 per cent of Indian children would be in school today, with relatively little difference (at the primary stage) between boys and girls, or between different communities?

The surge in enrolment means that more children from marginalised social groups are now in school. These children and their parents need more support if they are to cross the hurdles that lie in their path. Firstly, there are the cash costs of schooling. Although lower in 2006 than in 1996 in real terms, they continue to be a burden for parents with insecure livelihoods, such as those dependent on casual labour. Floods in Bihar at the time of the 2006 Survey were an important reminder of the extreme economic vulnerability of many households in rural India. Secondly, there is the need for children’s help with household chores and with work on the fields and looking after animals. Work activities were cited as an important reason for dropping out of school by the few children in the 6-12 age group who had dropped out of school. Work activities were reported to be much heavier among girls.¹ Thirdly, while parents from marginalised social groups were also extremely keen for their children to study further, their own lack of schooling² meant they could not teach the child at home. All these hurdles are particularly high for girls from marginalised social groups, although parental aspirations for girls’ education were found to have increased greatly between 1996 and 2006.

Low levels of teaching activity at school (discussed in Section 7.1) impact the learning of all children and particularly those from marginalised social groups. These children need additional inputs from the teacher to help them make the transition to becoming regular school-goers. Problems of discriminatory treatment within school for children of socially disadvantaged groups, and of alienation for children from tribes who live in remote areas all add to the problem.

7.1 *Low classroom activity*

While school enrolment has risen sharply in the decade between 1996 and 2006, classroom activity has not improved. This problem has several aspects.

7.1.1 *Enrolment does not mean attendance*

To begin with, enrolment does not mean attendance. Almost everywhere, we found that children’s attendance as noted in the school register was far below enrolment. Only around 66 per cent of children

¹ Girls again reported that school was attractive to them because it gave them a break from their normal chores.

² Educational deprivation was a common characteristic of adults from marginal social groups.

enrolled in the primary classes were marked present. And actual attendance, as observed by the field investigators, was even lower. Some children are only nominally enrolled; others are enrolled in both government and private schools; and still others attend only irregularly.

Schools were generally accessible and functional (a positive achievement, compared with the situation in 1996), but there were still instances where children could not attend school even if they wished. For instance, a primary school in Farukhabad district in Uttar Pradesh was closed when researchers visited; the head-teacher was reported to come only once a week.

7.1.2 *Attendance does not imply learning*

Even in functional schools, levels of teaching activity were abysmally low. One reason is the shortage of teachers. Even though there has been a major increase in the number of teachers appointed, the pupil-teacher ratio in the PROBE States has shown little improvement between the PROBE Survey and the PROBE Revisited Survey. The proportion of schools with only one teacher appointed has also shown no improvement since 1996. It has remained at 12 per cent. While additional teachers have been appointed in the earlier group of single-teacher schools, many of the new schools opened are currently single-teacher schools.

The situation is aggravated by the fact that teachers are often absent, or come late and leave early. The survey found that an additional 21 per cent of schools were functioning as single teacher schools on the day of the investigators' unannounced visit.

Teachers might also be present but not necessarily teaching. In one instance, the head-teacher was on leave and three of the remaining five teachers who were present were standing in the playground and talking amongst themselves when the investigators reached the school. Some children were sitting on benches and chatting while others were roaming around the school campus. As mentioned earlier, such instances (where schools were devoid of teaching activity at the time of the investigators' visit) were found in close to half of all schools surveyed. There were also many schools where some teachers were teaching and others not.

Teaching activity is particularly limited for the very young – those enrolled in classes 1 and 2. Instead of being given extra attention as they negotiate a new and alien terrain, these young children tend to be largely ignored. Children in older classes were more likely to be taught.

7.1.3 *Mindless rote learning still dominates*

Even in schools where teaching was going on, children were getting a raw deal. Mindless rote learning still dominates the classroom. We came across children chanting mathematical tables for several hours. Children 'read' paragraphs from their book after having memorized them. When asked even a simple question, they tend to falter; if asked to 'read' anything outside the text, they often can't. We frequently found children copying blindly from the blackboard or the textbook, without comprehension.

Even in terms of the elementary "3 Rs" (reading, writing and arithmetic), learning achievements were very poor. We found that 80 percent of children in Classes 4 or 5 could do simple addition, but only 60 percent could do simple subtraction, and barely half could do single-digit multiplication or a simple division by 5. Further, a large proportion of children are unable to read and write, or answer simple questions, even after 4 or 5 years at school. For instance, nearly 62 percent of children studying in Class 4 or 5 in a government school could not read a simple story. And more than 80 percent could not write the answer to a simple question. Unfortunately, years of schooling and grades completed continue to remain an unreliable guide to what children learn and know.

7.2 *No quick fix*

Is there any “quick fix” to revive classroom activity in Indian schools? Some have been tried, but with limited results.

7.2.1 *Contract teachers*

During the last 10 years, there have been mass appointments of local contract teachers (*shiksha karmis, shiksha mitras, para-teachers, etc.*) at salaries far below those paid to permanent teachers in the same government schools. In the government primary schools surveyed, contract teachers account for nearly 40 per cent of all teachers. Local selection by the Gram Panchayats, and the contractual nature of their appointment, was expected to make these teachers more accountable. Many state governments also saw this as a means of expanding teacher cadres at relatively low cost.

Educationists, however, have raised several concerns about contract teachers. In the initial stages, contract teachers were appointed to assist regular teachers who had more experience. But in many schools now, contract teachers handle the pupils on their own. Most new recruits get trained through distance education and short bursts of in-service training. Without adequate qualifications, training and support, teaching standards are unlikely to be high.

The 2006 Survey also found that a majority of contract teachers were from more privileged social groups. The recruits are unlikely to be accountable to parents and children from disadvantaged families. The presumption that Gram Panchayats will hold them accountable on behalf of the parents is often misplaced, as Panchayat leaders themselves often identify more with the contract teachers than with underprivileged children.

In some of the schools surveyed in 2006, the contract teachers were certainly more active than the permanent staff; but there were other schools where they were negligent. In the latter, it appears that they were protected by influential people. Their limited qualifications, inadequate training and low salaries also affect the quality of their work. Permanent teachers often fail to fulfil their mandate, but to replace them with contractual staff is no guarantee of better results.

7.2.2 *Token community participation*

Another possible basis of teacher accountability is community participation in school management. Under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, decentralized management was promoted through the setting up of different community organizations and committees including Village Education Committees (VECs), School Monitoring Committees (SMCs), School Development Management Committees (SDMCs), and School Education Committees (SECs). In fact, we found that almost all schools – 96 per cent of them – had such committees in place in 2006. In most cases, the committees have worked to improve physical infrastructure in the school, select contract teachers, and supervise midday meals.

However, these committees have not been effective in improving the levels of teaching activity. Once again, unequal power relations have interfered with the presumed channels of accountability. Power in most committees rests with the President (generally the sarpanch) and the Secretary (generally the head-teacher), who need to be held accountable in the first place. With the exception of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), representation of parents in these committees tends to be nominal, and their active involvement is rare. The survey found numerous instances where committee members did not even know that their name had been included in the committee! While parents are better represented in PTAs (and active PTAs were found in some states, notably Madhya Pradesh), a majority of parents in government schools belong to disadvantaged social groups and so find it difficult to play a leadership or monitoring role.

This does not detract from the importance of community participation in reviving classroom activity. But active and informed community participation requires much more than token committees, especially in India's divided and unequal social context.

7.2.3 *Private schools*

Another "quick fix" is greater reliance on private schools. It is widely assumed that private schools function better than government schools, because they are accountable to the parents. Indeed, the survival of a private school depends on attracting children, and this requires some classroom activity, since parents are unlikely to pay the fees unless their children are learning. The fact that private schools are proliferating, not only in urban areas but also in rural areas, often creates an impression that this is the "solution".

A closer look at the evidence, however, does not support these rosy expectations. It may well be true that classroom activity levels and achievements of basic literacy and numeracy are often higher in private schools than in government schools. However, the quality of private schools varies a great deal, and is low on important parameters such as the qualifications of teachers in the "cheaper" ones (those that are accessible to poor families). Their success in attracting children often hinges more on deception (e.g. misleading claims of being "English medium" or even "convent" schools) than actual quality. Further, a privatized schooling system is fundamentally inequitable, as schooling opportunities depend on one's ability to pay. It also puts girls at a disadvantage: boys accounted for 74 per cent of all children enrolled in private schools in the 2006 survey (compared with 51 per cent of all children in government schools). By perpetuating existing social inequalities, private schooling defeats one of the main purposes of universal elementary education – breaking the old barriers of class, caste and gender in Indian society.

Last but not least, it is worth noting that in spite of the recent mushrooming of private schools, a large majority of children in rural India are still in government schools. In fact, there was little change in this respect between the 1996 Survey and 2006 Survey: in both years, about 80 per cent of school-going children (in the age group of 6-12 years) were enrolled in government schools. This situation is likely to continue in the foreseeable future, and makes it imperative to do something about classroom activity levels in government schools, instead of "giving up" on them.

It is worth noting that all these quick fixes (contract teaching, community participation and private schools) have capsized on the rock of social inequality. This hurdle needs to be confronted "head on" if real change is to be achieved. Himachal Pradesh's experience points in the same direction.

7.3 *Himachal Pradesh is different*

Based on the 1996 Survey, the PROBE Report highlighted Himachal Pradesh's remarkable progress in the field of elementary education, even described as a "schooling revolution". It was heartening to find, in 2006, that Himachal was still doing very well. Indeed, we found that 99 per cent of all children (in the 6-12 age group) were enrolled in school. And more importantly, 92 per cent of enrolled children were present on the day of the unannounced visit, as against 66 per cent in the other states. Further, in Himachal Pradesh a much lower proportion of schools had no teaching activity at the time of the investigators' unannounced visit.

Interestingly, this success is not based on any "quick fix", but on responsible management of a "traditional" schooling system, based on government schools and regular teachers, with a little help from a relatively egalitarian social context. Only 15 per cent of teachers in Himachal Pradesh were contract teachers. Village Education Committees and Parent-Teacher Associations were generally functional, and many were engaged in school monitoring as well as other activities. This is not to say that all is well with the schooling system in Himachal Pradesh. For instance, we came across a primary school where there was no teaching activity, and

another where a single teacher was handling 43 children spread over five classes. Nevertheless, such instances were few. We did not come across persistent evidence of apathy and under-performance.

7.4 *Concluding remarks*

This report does not offer simple remedies to the illnesses of the schooling system, but we hope that it has at least helped to clarify the issues. The resurvey of PROBE villages in 2006 has brought to light major progress in specific areas, such as schooling facilities and enrolment rates – the “good news” section is perhaps more substantial than one might have predicted in 1996 at the time of completion of the PROBE Report. But many fundamental problems remain, including low classroom activity, the poor quality of education, and discrimination due to social disparities in schooling opportunities. These problems are unlikely to go away without a broad-based movement for the right to education, involving not only government authorities but also community institutions and the public at large.

The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (discussed in Chapter 2) may help in this respect, but much depends on how it unfolds. Reviving classroom activity, for instance, is not a major focus of the Act, and in fact, some provisions of it are likely to make things harder, not easier, in that respect. For instance, the “automatic promotion” clause (which precludes holding back any child in any class), and the ban on unrecognized private schools (which shelters government schools from competition), further reduce the pressure on schools to perform – justified as these provisions may be in their own right. The Act does not also pin responsibility on any official or prescribe redressal mechanisms in the event that a child is denied her entitlements. On the other hand, the Act puts in place new institutions that could possibly be used to revive classroom activity and enhance the quality of education, such as the School Management Committees. But it should be clear from the findings presented in this report that activating and empowering these Committees is likely to be a major challenge.

There is, thus, no guarantee that the Right to Education Act will lead to a major breakthrough in the quality and equity of school education in India. However, it is at least an opportunity – a tool that can be used in various ways to bringing about further change. If another follow-up report is written ten years from now, we hope that a much wider range of issues will figure in the “good news” section even as the struggle to give children their right to education and a fair deal will continue.

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