

EDUCATION FOR ALL – MID DECADE ASSESSMENT

**UNIVERSAL ELEMENTARY EDUCATION
*PURSUIT OF EQUITY WITH QUALITY***

Manabi Majumdar



**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION
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Preface

The World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal approved a comprehensive vision of Education for All (EFA) to be achieved by 2015 based on the six goals. The six goals relate to the areas of early childhood care and education, universalising primary education, gender, youth and adolescents, adult education and quality of education. The main focus is on 'reaching the unreached' for ensuring complete coverage of education. With this background the *Mid- Decade Assessment of Education for All* was initiated to take stock of the progress made with respect to EFA Goals. Corresponding to this exercise, a comprehensive review of the progress made with respect to Education for All in India was conducted jointly by Government of India and the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA).

The present work which is a sequel to the National Report consists of a series of thematic and state review papers. There are nine thematic review papers covering all the six goals including three additional papers on three other themes, namely, Teacher and Teacher Education, Management Strategies for EFA and Financing of EFA in India. These thematic review papers are further followed by a series of analytical papers covering progress of EFA in twenty seven states of India. State reviews attempt to present a quick picture of the current level of progress in each state of India assessing the magnitude of the task involved in achieving EFA goals and projecting a realistic time frame as well as strategies needed to reach the goals. Each thematic review as well as state-specific analytical review paper has been prepared by an established expert in the respective area/state in close collaboration with national and state governments.

The review papers along with the National Report present a comprehensive and disaggregated picture of the progress made towards EFA goals in the country. The papers are coming out at a very opportune time when the Parliament is engaged in debating the legislation to make education for all children a Fundamental Right. While the thematic papers highlight state of development of education with respect to different goals of EFA, the State papers present the diversity of the situation across the country. The whole series would serve as an invaluable independent documentation on various aspects of EFA ranging from early childhood care and education to universal elementary education and adult literacy programmes using authentic data sources accompanied by a review of relevant empirical research.

The whole Project involving the National Report along with the series of thematic and state analytical review papers were conceived and executed by Prof. R.

Govinda, NUEPA who led the entire exercise and would like to thank him profusely for his leadership. Dr. Mona Sedwal who as a part of the Project Team at NUEPA contributed immensely to the whole exercise also deserves appreciation. The Team immensely benefited by the advice given by the Technical Advisory Group set up under the Chairmanship of Professor A.K. Sharma for guiding the entire exercise. I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to Prof. A. K. Sharma for his invaluable guidance. Finally, I would also like to acknowledge the generous financial support provided by UNICEF and UNESCO.

Ved Prakash
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Editorial Note

Indian Constitution directs the State to provide free and compulsory education for all children upto the age of 14. This goal has been pursued by the country for nearly six decades through successive development plans. The last two decades have witnessed significant improvements in children's participation in schooling, accompanied by substantial increase in investments. The recent effort to raise resources for the sector through imposition of an education cess is major effort in that direction. Even though school education has traditionally remained a subject for action by State Governments, Government of India has, during the last two decades following the National Policy on Education – 1986, begun to play a leading role. This culminated in the launching of the national programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in 2001. Despite all these efforts, the final goal of providing quality education for all has eluded the country.

Urgency of reaching the goal has been heightened in recent years due to several national and international developments, including commitments made under the Dakar Framework for Action for providing quality Education for All by 2015, which not only covers primary education but also focus on literacy goals, gender equality and quality concerns. The Dakar Framework of Action listed the following six specific goals to be achieved by all countries.

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.
4. Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
6. Improving every aspect of the quality of education, and ensuring their excellence so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The National Plan of Action for Education for All (2002) in India reflects this sense of urgency felt within the country by proposing to reach the targets much ahead of the international dateline. At the national level, the Constitutional Amendment in 2002 declaring education in the age group 6-14 which corresponds to the elementary education stage of schooling a fundamental right has brought the issue of universal

elementary education (UEE) to the centre stage of public discourse. The country is in the process of drawing up the legislation for effective implementation of the right for translating the constitutional provision into reality. With the progress made in recent years the goal seems to be achievable by the international time frame of 2015. But this requires systematic assessment of the various goals the present exercise is one such effort.

UNESCO has been bringing out annual review of the progress made in moving towards the goal of EFA through the Global Monitoring Report. These assessments do not reflect an encouraging picture of the Indian scene. This is an issue of serious concern for the national leadership as one sixth of the world population lives in India. With around 65% adult literacy rate, there are more around 350 million adult illiterates in the country. This should not be taken to imply that no efforts are being made to meet the challenge of EFA. Besides, the national averages do not fully reflect the diverse reality characterizing educational progress in India. In fact, it is paradoxical that while certain pockets of the country are emerging as the international hub for creating a knowledge society, certain other regions and sections of the population continue to be deprived of even basic education. It is clear that in pursuing EFA goals, not all states and regions of the country are in the same league. The variety is too wide to draw any generalization. While some states have made remarkable progress in education, practically eradicating illiteracy and achieving near universal participation of children in elementary education, several other states continue to remain far from the final goal. What is needed to progress faster in moving towards the 2015 EFA deadline in all parts of the country? This obviously demands an analytical exercise - goalwise as well as statewise.

It is with this objective in view that the present exercise was taken up to make an independent assessment of the progress achieved in different states and with respect to different EFA goals. The present series of papers constitute the outcome of such a comprehensive exercise carried out by independent experts, in collaboration with Central and State Governments. The main purpose of the exercise is to place before policy makers, planners and the civil society as a whole an analytical picture of the progress made towards EFA goals and the challenges ahead for reaching the goals in a realistic fashion.

The exercise consisted of three parts. The first part consisted of presenting an overview of progress in the country with respect to six goals highlighted in the Dakar Declaration. This was largely based on the technical guidelines for assessment prepared by UNESCO. A national report entitled "Education for All Mid-Decade Assessment: Reaching the Unreached" has been prepared and published jointly by NUEPA and Government of India.

The Second Part consists of a series of nine thematic review papers dealing with different dimensions of 'Education for All' keeping in view the Indian context and priorities. These include: (i) Early Childhood Care and Education; (ii) Universal

Elementary Education; (iii) Adult Education; (iv) Towards Gender Equality in Education; (v) Education of Adolescents and Young Adults; (vi) Quality of Education; (vii) teacher and teacher education; (viii) Management Strategies for EFA and (ix) Financing of EFA. Each of these papers has been prepared by an expert or experts in the respective area. The papers were reviewed by another independent expert and revised based on the observations.

The third part consists of analytical papers covering all states of India. Each thematic review as well as state-specific analytical review was prepared by an established expert in the respective area/state in close collaboration with national and state governments. The state level reviews are prepared on lines similar to what was followed for preparing the national review. Each of them deals with comprehensively on all six goals of EFA specified in the Dakar Declaration.

The present paper by Manabí Majumdar presents a comprehensive review of the elementary education scene in the country and also assesses the prospects of meeting the EFA and Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015. This is indeed the central component of the EFA efforts. The last 10-15 years have witnessed unprecedented expansion of elementary education facilities in the country. However, assessment carried out around 2000 indicated that the task yet to be accomplished is very huge not only in terms of overall magnitude but also with respect to equity and quality of provisions being made available to children. Recent years have also seen the emergence of the nationwide programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan with very ambitious goals and targets. Adoption of the Constitutional Amendment making elementary education a fundamental right has added further urgency for concerted action in the area. The present paper acquires special significance in the context of these developments in recent years.

This elaborate exercise of assessing the progress in EFA should be viewed in the context of repeated assertions by the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report on EFA that India is at the risk of not making the global targets with respect to several EFA goals. The findings of the review clearly points out that the situation across the country is very diverse. While some States have registered fast progress on all fronts, some others continue to lag behind. Also in general, access to schooling has improved every where even though much remains to be done with respect to other goals of EFA. It is hoped that the various volumes brought out through the exercise would together present a realistic analysis and a disaggregated picture of the Education for All process and achievements in the country.

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This comprehensive exercise of reviewing the progress of EFA has been done through active involvement and support of a large team of experts and officials from Government of India as well as various State Governments. The exercise was carried out under the constant guidance of the members of the Technical Advisory Group under the leadership of Professor A. K. Sharma. The task could not have been completed without the commitment and support of Professor Ved Prakash, Vice Chancellor, NUEPA. Special thanks are due to Smt. Anita Kaul, Joint Secretary, MHRD, Government of India who played a central role in conceiving and implementing the whole exercise. Financial support for the exercise came from UNICEF and UNESCO; in particular, thanks are due to Mr. Samphe Lhalungpa who took personal interest in ensuring that the Project is completed smoothly. We would like to record our appreciation for the technical support and cooperation given by the NUEPA Publication Unit and for printing and publishing the volumes.

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INTRODUCTION

Greater educational participation of the hitherto excluded groups in our society is increasingly being viewed as a legitimate social goal, although it is by no means immune to political debate or controversy, or practical difficulties. The enterprise of universalizing elementary education (UEE) in India must, therefore, be scrutinized and debated continuously such that it remains glued to the goals of equity and quality. This is a project and a process that may never be over, since both the idea and practice of education- i.e. the conceptualization of educational values as well as the design of improved social policies – are subject to persistent scrutiny and revision. This in turn points to the need to have sustained educational debates and efforts rather than fitful interventions. Simply put, education for all (EFA) ‘with equity and quality’ entails a continuous and dynamic unfolding of educational thoughts, actions and outcomes, egging on for constant re-examination, refinement and even revision of both theoretical understanding and educational practice.ⁱ

The present assessment of progress towards the EFA goals in India therefore is not taken up in the spirit of treating these initiatives as a one-shot affair, much as we appreciate the significance of a ‘wake-up call’ in the form of a directive to all the constituent states of the Indian Union to achieve UEE by 2010.ⁱⁱ To decompose this broad objective further, our goal is to achieve hundred percent gross enrolment rate at the primary and upper primary stages, then hundred percent net enrolment ratio, followed by hundred percent completion to the end of upper primary, and gender parity in enrolment and attainment at these levels. In brief, timely entry into elementary classes, on-schedule progression through various grades, upper primary completion, and transition to secondary level are the core elements of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (The EFA campaign). The campaign has been relatively ‘active’ in some parts of the country, while remaining ‘dormant’ elsewhere. Our aim here, therefore, is to furnish a disaggregated picture of both the progress and problems of current

reform initiatives in the country, in order for a better idea of their future prospects. Thus, we do not start off with any polemics about either the utter failure or roaring success of the contemporary education programmes; we rather treat these as strategies on trial.

It is well to concede at the outset that the foundational values and aims of education (i.e. the vision of education) that seemingly underpin the various educational policies and programmes remain outside the explicit focus of the present review. Yet, to set the contours of our discussion, we cast a fleeting glance at some of the views and arguments that surround the idea of education. Prominent thinkers and scholars have talked about several 'intrinsic' as well as 'instrumental' values of education, for the individual as well as for society in general, ranging from economic opportunities, benefits and profitability in the market on one hand to the broader capacity for democratic citizenship, critical reflection and independent moral thinking on the other. In Tagore's vision of education, the 'moral man' is placed above the 'commercial man', though education for economic success is not entirely devalued. And, his educational thinking is centred around the child: 'education must begin with the mind of the child and it must have the goal of increasing

that mind's freedom...rather than killing it off' (Nussbaum, 2007: 393).

The immediate and limited purposes of education should ideally have an underpinning of such deeper educational imagination. In a similar vein, the quality of schooling must crucially hinge on the extent to which schools can keep the child's imagination, critical capacities and independence of mind alive. This paper, however, does not delve into these quality issues, or issues of good textbooks, good pedagogy and good, non-hierarchical, classroom environments at the elementary education level in any great detail.

One may also find the paper relatively silent about the fact that the system of school education (along with its policy paraphernalia) is not necessarily an assured 'passport to success'. In a climate of definitive policy claims about various school reform initiatives and their 'straightforwardly positive' effects, it is indeed well to put in mind that entrenched social inequalities often get mirrored within the school system. We, therefore, need to consider two opposing possibilities while discussing the potential of education: education can be a social equalizer; education can also reproduce social inequalities.ⁱⁱⁱ Historically, both policies and curriculum of education have been

used 'as a means of power and control', as a tool for cultural and political indoctrination (to promote sectarian and parochial purposes). Given such contradictory records of the use of education for either social justice or social control, the current policy commitment towards egalitarian school reforms must not degenerate into a kind of policy-cocksureness, i.e., into a presumption that 'all good things must go together'.

Several scholars have indeed forcefully argued that educational policies are not necessarily benign (Freire, 1972; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Chopra and Jeffery, 2005); nor are they always part of the solution; they too may become part of the problem. Reflecting on the hierarchy and gradation of schools in America, Bowles and Gintis, for example, contend that '...the school system [is] unable to support the myth of equal opportunity'. More disconcertingly, even egalitarian school reforms may not lead to egalitarian educational outcomes, '...may leave income inequality substantially untouched', as the experience of African-Americans in America shows 'a tenuous relationship of schooling to economic success', '...pointing to the virtual irrelevance of educational resources or quality as a determinant of educational outcomes'. More generally, Bowles and Gintis point out the limits of

school reforms leaving other structural economic forces of inequality untouched.^{iv} Reverting back to the segmented society of ours, we find through the writings of several prominent scholars (Nambissan, 2000; Velaskar, 1998) how class and caste divisions routinely stymie the pace and progress of educational programmes.

These voices and views go against the grain of a mistaken, but rather common, perception that educational norms and goals are politically settled issues and are therefore beyond the ambit of any political controversy. It is a short step from here to argue that appropriate policies can actualize 'universally accepted' educational goals in a rather sure-footed manner, provided the implementation snags are taken care of. But EFA is not simply a policy enterprise; quintessentially it is a political enterprise, shaped by the currents and crosscurrents of democratic politics, played out at the national, state, and grassroots levels. It is no surprise that the political conditions and policy efforts appear to be more propitious for the EFA mission in some parts of the country than elsewhere. Disregarding these political contingencies, in our assessment of educational progress, will obfuscate rather than aid any attempt to achieve the goal of quality education for all. In short, one might have, quite rightly,

doubts about the *inevitable* progress of reform initiatives on two counts: 1) the political apparatus undertaking reforms may not have the right intentions; 2) the policies that we consider today as appropriate and important to carry forward school reforms may not prove to be worth pursuing later on, that is to say, policy judgements are potentially fallible. The present analysis does not dwell on this issue any further, except to acknowledge the possibility of contradictory, if not negative, educational outcomes that the school system and its reform might produce.

However, recognizing the possible failings of the school system is not the same as doubting, dismissing, or devaluing the importance of an adequate educational foundation for all elementary school-age children, especially for the already disprivileged. To put it differently, this paper holds on to one central idea that echoes Page (2005), namely, that education has the potential to 'enhance' and 'transform' every life, and to give every individual a chance to compete for social opportunities. The rest it is ready to

reexamine and interrogate, including the currently popular target orientation. School could potentially make a difference to one's life choices; school could potentially be a site to challenge social inequalities; school could be a potent instrument of progressive transformation – the view that the so-called de-schoolers dispute. They critique 'compulsory miseducation' and urge for 'liberation from the grip of schools'. Here we disagree with this position. We echo Dewey's sentiment when we reiterate that in principle it is possible to use education as an instrument for personal development as well as for social equality. Hence, EFA is not simply a mechanically conceived policy target for chasing enrolment and attendance but a deeper statement about the need for attacking entrenched social inequalities and an affirmation of the idea that schooling has a liberating potential.^v This optimism is tempered by a ready acknowledgement that actualizing this potential is a political and policy challenge, since there is no guarantee of inevitable progress.^{vi}

PROGRESS TOWARDS EFA GOALS

Recent Reform Initiatives

All the above qualifications made, we now set out to assess recent advances towards EFA goals, in the light of the contemporary policy interventions as well as the available evidence of their effects.^{vii} However, we do not plan to laboriously plow through the mass of data available on several standard indicators of universal elementary education. Instead, we aim to sketch out the broad contours of recent developments in the elementary education sector, focusing on some selective themes and in-exhaustive statistics.

Surely, the DPEP-SSA initiatives have picked up momentum during the final years of the 1990s and especially since the beginning of the new millennium, although actual implementation of this programme has taken many forms. To provide a quick sense of history, the backdrop to the contemporary reform initiatives has been shaped by the New Education Policy discourse in the 1980s, the entry of external agencies in the country's education scene in the

1990s, and the more recent educational enterprise called the National Curriculum Framework since the beginning of the new millennium. A number of concrete measures have been adopted to promote progress towards EFA goals. Kainth (2006) helpfully summarizes the various components of the SSA scheme. The SSA was launched in November 2000 as an umbrella programme that sought to ensure five years of primary education by 2007 and eight years of elementary education by 2010 for all children in the age group of 6-14 years, 'with a special focus on educational needs of girls, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and other children in difficult circumstances' (Kainth, 2006: 3288). In 2003 a new programme called National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) was introduced that professed to further improve the SSA scheme through providing 'girl child friendly schools', as well as stationery, uniforms etc. for disadvantaged girls at the elementary level. This programme is in operation in educationally backward blocks (classified according

to the level of female literacy, SCST female literacy as well the gender gap in literacy), as well as in urban slums.

Another new scheme called Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) has been launched during 2004-05 to set up residential elementary schools for girl students belonging to SCST, OBC, and minority communities. Additional monetary incentive will be provided to the girl child who passes through the eighth standard and enrolls in a secondary school – an instance of policy encouragement for wider secondary school participation among girls. A sum of Rupees three thousand will be deposited in her name, which she would be entitled to withdraw upon receiving 18 years of age (Kainth, 2006).

Promising Results

Policy pronouncements, expectedly, have been followed by several concrete measures in the form of, say, establishing new schools, improving school infrastructure, recruiting additional teachers, and above all boosting enrolment and attendance ratios.^{viii} According to official figures, between 2001 and 2006, nearly one lakh thirty thousand new primary schools have been set up nationwide. Six lakh additional primary teachers have been recruited during the same period (Annex Table 1). Encouragingly, gross enrolment ratios among primary

school-age children (6-11 years) have risen from 96.3 percent in 2001-02 to 98.3 percent in 2003-04. The corresponding figures for the upper primary level are reported to be 52.1 percent and 62.5 percent respectively. The drop out rate has dropped from 39.03 percent in 2001-02 to 31.36 percent in 2003-04.^{ix} In fact, several indicators of educational growth such as age-specific attendance rates, gender ratios of enrolment, and pupil survival rates registered promising trends. However, the comparatively low net primary school attendance rate in the country (in one rather optimistic estimate it is about 80 percent), and particularly in the educationally poorer states, remains a cause for concern.

It is well to point out that significant differences between various data sets (for example, between departmental statistics and DISE data, between NSSO and Census data) are indeed considerable and puzzling. For example, according to the NSSO 55th round estimates, 78 percent of children aged 6-11 years were attending school in 1999-2000. This is a much lower estimate than what the official figures suggest for the immediately following year. This is not to suggest that advances made in enrolment and attendance rates are simply the artifact of data inaccuracy. A comparison of longitudinal data on school participation compiled by various rounds of the NSS clearly indicates that between 1993-94

(i.e. the 50th round) and 1999-2000 (i.e. the 55th round) there has been an increase of about 7-10 percent in the age-specific enrolment rate for children in the age group of 6-11 years (World Bank, 2004).

This average growth for the nation as a whole of course masks large differences in the primary enrolment rates across states. As this study further indicates, the attendance rate exceeds 90 percent in the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, and the states of the North East. The corresponding figure for Bihar, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh is 75 percent or lower. Bihar brings up the rear with only 53 percent of the children aged 6-11 years attending school in 1999-2000.

Significantly, notwithstanding their low initial starting points, states like Rajasthan and MP have made impressive strides in school participation of children in the reference period. Bihar's record however stands out in this respect, as it almost stands still, unable to break the cycle of low level and slow progress. Gender ratios of enrolment are more inspiring in the educationally forward states (the North-eastern states, Kerala and HP have the highest ratios of female to male students), while Bihar, UP, Rajasthan and MP have far lower ratios. For socially disadvantaged groups, the ratio is more adverse for female students.

Another measure of educational participation of school-age children, namely, the net primary attendance rate shows much slower progress relative to the age-specific rate throughout the country; this is the result, the World Bank (2004) study claims, of late entry in primary school. Others argue, however, that the low net primary enrolment rate is an upshot of both overage and underage enrolment.^x In urban areas, in particular, there is almost a social pressure to send a child to school straight from the cradle. In fact, the Delhi School Education Act allows school admission of children after 5 years, which violates the school age norm of 6-14 years. A general rider that could be issued here is that in assessing educational progress it is perhaps unhelpful to take a rigid, linear and mechanical view of schooling. In other words, wider educational participation rather than a rigid insistence on the right age at entry may have a greater appeal as a larger goal of human development. This is not to underestimate the importance of timely entry (certainly not premature entry) and timely progression of children through the entire cycle of elementary schooling, but simply to be wary of a tendency to treat targets qua targets.^{xi}

According to the latest NSSO figures, in 2004-05 the proportion of rural children (6-13 years) not attending school is 14

percent; and in urban areas it is 8 percent (Sankar, 2007).^{xii} Having started at a modest level, the rise in school attendance has indeed been impressive in rural areas. The decline in the number of children out of school is evident across all social groups, but it is striking among SCST communities again partly due to their modest starting points. However, the proportion of non-schooled children is still the highest among them. Also, about 20 percent of the Muslim children in the age group of 6-13 years are still outside the ambit of the school system, as the NSS 2004-05 data suggest. Somewhat encouragingly, in the recent past there has been a noticeable reduction in the percentage of non-schooled children from poorer families. In a spirit of cautious optimism one may claim that social, economic, gender and locational gaps in schooling are narrowing down in the country over time and that 'the acceleration of progress is palpable in the last few years' (Sankar, 2007). Clearly, the sense of urgency that the EFA goals have produced has paid some dividend; this is true irrespective of a healthy concern for the downside of target fetishism.

Regional Contrasts in Educational Participation

India is large and diverse – a continent-like country with considerable regional variations; it is important therefore to look at the major disparities that exist

between regions and socio-economic groups in educational performance. Large areas within the country continue to remain educationally challenged, with a sizable number of its school-age children still remaining out of school. If we look at the contribution of the major states to the national stock of children out of school (6-11 year olds), it will appear that 'school attendance is [spatially] concentrated' (The 11th Plan Working Group Report, GoI., 2007). Encouragingly, even in the league of educationally challenged states, not all are standing still; in spite of their initial lag some are forging ahead. To put it differently, there are educationally dormant/stagnating, educationally improving and educationally forward states within the same Union, displaying different registers of educational progress and prospects. And it is hard not to pay a special attention to the weighty challenge of UEE, faced by that part of India which is not shining in educational terms.

'More than half of the children not attending school in 2004-05 are concentrated in the two states of UP and Bihar. MP accounts for another 11 percent of all out-of-school children aged 6-11 years' (ibid.) Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Orissa and West Bengal are the other major contributors to this national educational burden. Even after taking projected increase in school attendance and primary completion rates into consideration, a few

available studies (World Bank, 2004; Bhalotra and Zamora, 2006; Sankar, 2007) find faint chances for these states to achieve the EFA goals within the pre-set deadline. (For the country as a whole, about 1.34 crore children in the age-group of 6-14 years, i.e. about 7 percent of the school age population, are out of school, as per a survey quoted in the 11th Plan Working Group Report, Gol, 2007). Furthermore, we have to pay concurrent attention to wide-ranging differences in educational performance across states as well as between districts within a state. There are 50 districts in the country, for example, with more than 15 percent of children (6-14 years) not within school.

Mitigating the Effects of Social and Economic Status: State/Institutional Effects

To focus on a differently schooled and differently lettered country of continental dimension (many of the provincial governments are larger than most West European countries), we, at the risk of being selective, put one theme in the foreground, namely, the relative success of the constituent states and their respective institutions in bringing the underprivileged sections of society into the school system. To put it differently, we do not talk so much about state averages or the progress reports of the so-called forward or affluent social classes or groups

therein. Indeed, the Indian states have remarkably similar and consistently positive records as far as the enrolment and attainment of the 'privilegensia' is concerned. In contrast, divergence among states is striking when we look at the educational participation among the poorer and more vulnerable sections of the population. Again, the educational gap between the rich and the poor is old news, but the gap itself varies a great deal across states (Filmer and Pritchett, 1998).

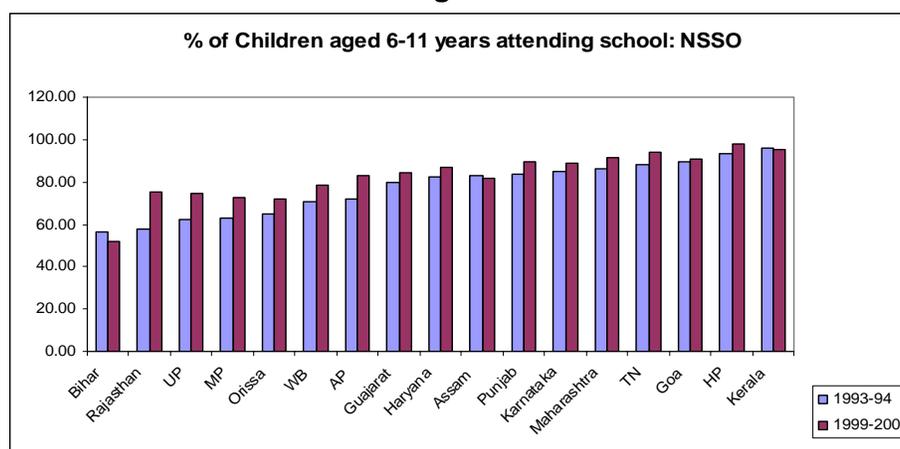
What is more, the educational fortune of the underdogs, in absolute terms, varies widely among the states, so much so that in some states they have almost shed their label of backwardness. In short, in a situation in which we routinely expect small differences among the upper classes and castes (for example, the rich, urban residents, forward castes, and male children) but huge differences among the traditionally disadvantaged social and economic groups in enrolment and attainment, it is important to understand how, to use the words of Filmer and Pritchett, '...some states have been able to reach the bottom part of the economic [and social] distribution and bring them into the education system' (1998:28). Put differently, it is useful to probe what enables some states, having more or less similar economic conditions, to mitigate somewhat the effects of wealth, caste, gender or

locality on schooling, but disables others from doing so. This is what may be called the state or institutional effect, which in turn gives us a clue about what works and what is possible, fiscal and other constraints notwithstanding. Within the framework of a uniform, centrally conceived SSA scheme, a handful of states have made a difference through acknowledging the need to give priority to underprivileged groups in the process of universalization.

We discuss this issue with the help of a few graphs presented below that focus selectively on age-specific enrolment ratios among children from various

socio-economic groups. The corresponding data are furnished in Annex tables. Figure 2.1 compares progress, between 1993-94 and 1999-2000, in the attendance ratios of primary school age children (6-11 years) in the major states of India, drawing on the NSSO data. Within a short span of six years the country records an impressive increase of 10 percentage points in (primary) school attendance. Of the 17 major states discussed here, Bihar stands at the bottom throughout the reference period, hardly indicating any sign of progress (on the contrary a drop in attendance) in between.

Figure 2.1



Source: NSSO data culled from World Bank (2004)

However, considerable differences spring up between NSSO data (1999-2000) and Census Statistics (2001), both looking at the attendance ratios of children aged 6-11 years within a gap of just one year. The census estimates

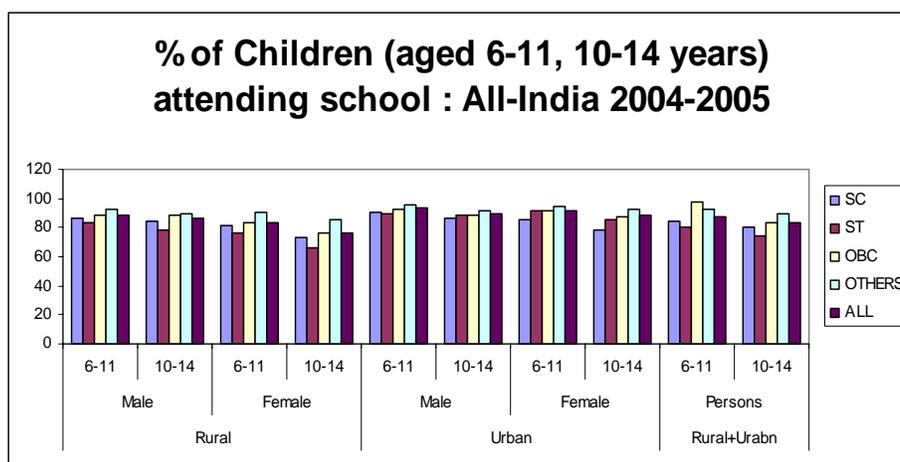
are much lower for many states as compared to the NSSO figures. We are unable to comment on this any further. The rank ordering of the states remains more or less intact, especially for the league of high achievers. Again, states

like Bihar, UP, Orissa, MP, Rajasthan, and West Bengal appear as relative laggards in both the estimates. However, Assam slides down considerably in inter-state ranking when we look at the census data; the opposite is true for AP.

The latest NSSO data, for the year 2004-05, indicate significant average improvement (taking India as a whole) in enrolment and attendance of (elementary) school age children (6-14 years) belonging to various social groups (Figure 2.2). Progress among

rural children has been palpable; the gender ratios of enrolment have also shown improvements. The aggregate scenario of course masks regional contrasts and deficits. For some of the more populous states of the country, for example, the Millennium Development Goal of universal net enrolment and retention by 2015 is hard to achieve (World Bank, 2004; Bhalotra and Zamora, 2006; Sankar, 2007), let alone the SSA targets of UPE by 2007 and UEE by 2010.

Figure 2.2



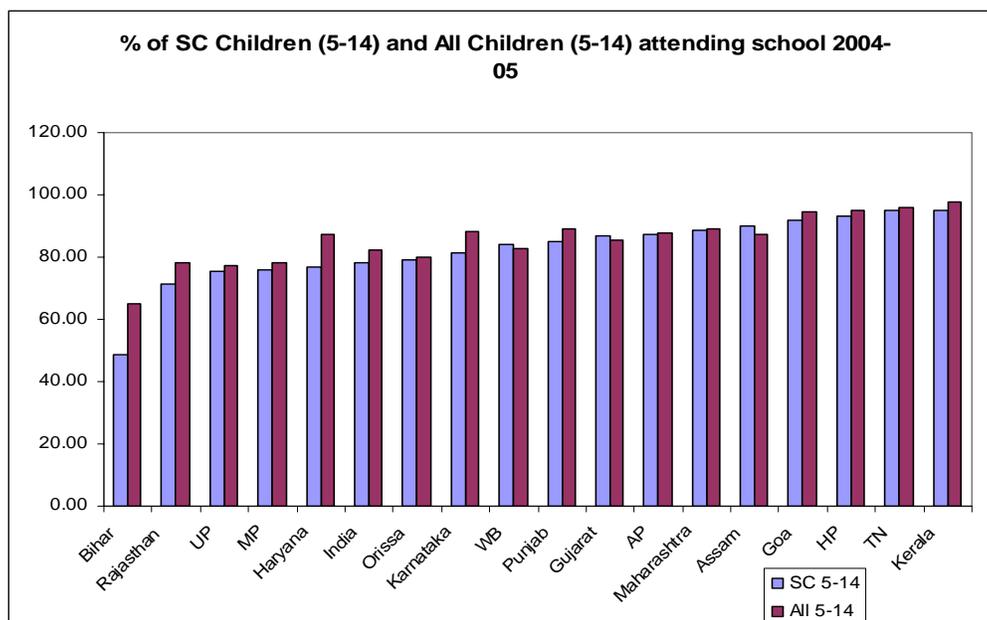
Source: NSSO, Gol. 2006

Figure 2.3 demonstrates graphically the latest (2004-05 NSSO data, Gol, 2006) state-wise scenario in school participation of children in the age group of 5-14 years, with a special focus on SC children. There are indeed large differences in the educational participation of the disadvantaged across the states under consideration.

Importantly, barring one or two exceptions, the states that enjoy a comparative edge over others in average terms are also the ones that do relatively better in reaching out to the SC children. This clearly suggests that aggregate growth in education depends crucially on the educational progress of the traditionally

disadvantaged groups; in short, growth cannot simply be elite-driven; it has to be inclusive.

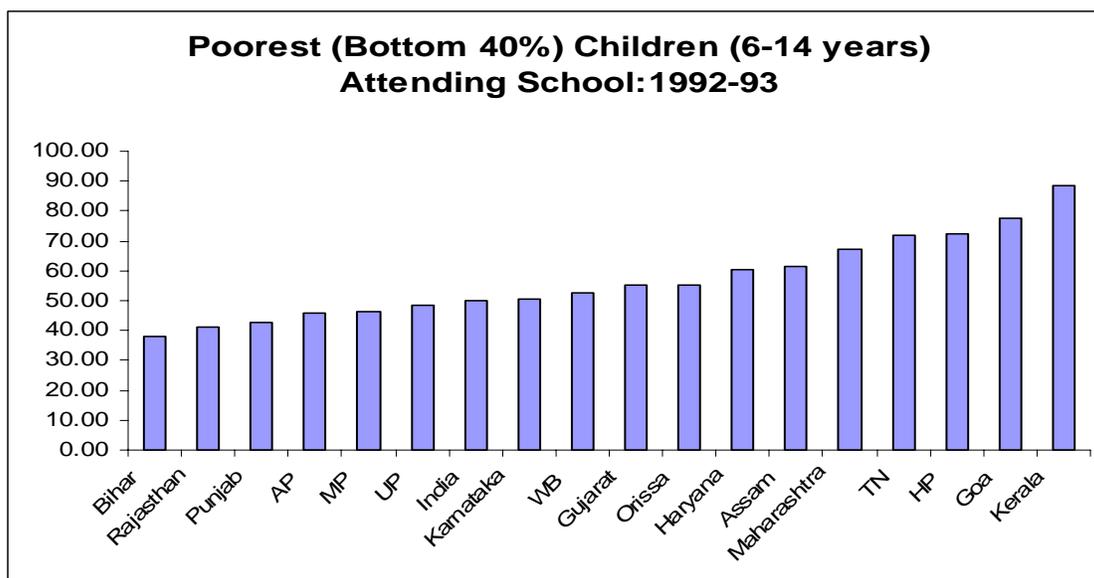
Figure 2.3



Source: NSSO, Gol., 2006.

Drawing upon the analysis and calculations by Filmer and Pritchett (1998) of NFHS I, 1992/93 (IIPS, 1995) data, Figure 2.4 delineates the widely varying attendance ratios, across states, of children (6-14 years) of poorer families (the bottom 40 percent of an asset-based indicator of poverty). It is old news that the elite overwhelmingly participate in the education system and that the Indian states have a remarkably similar record in this respect. What is, however, both intriguing and encouraging is the wide

gap in the school participation rate of the poor across these states. This clearly suggests that the educational aspirations and efforts of the poor are not foredoomed to fail; rather, as their experience in states like Kerala, TN, HP, Goa and Maharashtra shows, under propitious policy and institutional environment they can be successfully brought within the fold of education. In the midst of general gloom vis-à-vis the schooling of the poor, there are real prospects for the development of an egalitarian education system.

Figure 2.4


Source: Filmer and Pritchett (1998)

Pre-Primary, Primary and Upper Primary Education: An Integrated Approach

Of course, a more equal school system stands in need of greater upper primary enrolment; indeed this should be one of the priorities in the process of universalizing elementary education, because a sizable proportion of primary school graduates, in many parts of the country, do not make the transition to upper primary level, due to a variety of reasons that tend to push them out of the system. One such systemic shortcoming pertains to the inadequate supply of upper primary schools.^{xiii} Since there are not enough upper primary schools there is bound to be rationing of places/seats at the post-primary level. So a 'transition

bottleneck' between the primary and upper primary levels is not just due to students' personal failings or private choice, but also because of public deficiency, i.e., inadequate availability of upper primary schools. Due to paucity in public supply quite ironically the system itself cannot afford to encourage or even allow all primary school graduates to make the transition to the post-primary level.

The SSA norm for the ratio of primary to upper primary schools is 2:1, while in practice it is 2.5:1 according to the 2005-06 estimates. To actualize the norm, 140000 additional upper primary schools will be needed. Significantly, this aggregate picture gets much more variegated and mixed when we look at

the record of individual states. The ratio in question is plainly more favourable in some states than elsewhere in the country. The 11th Plan Working Group Report, for example, states that the ratio of primary to upper primary schools varies from 1.5 in Gujarat to 5.3 in West Bengal.^{xiv}

As we stress the need to strengthen the linkage between primary and upper primary levels of schooling and to ease the transition from one to the other, we must also pay attention to the lower end of the continuum, that is to say, to the interconnectedness between ICDS centres/Anganwadis and primary schools. Indeed, it is hard to overemphasize the necessity to forge close linkage between early childhood education and elementary education, and hence between the SSA programme and the ICDS programme. The FOCUS study (2006) focuses on children under six, i.e., the pre-school children who are outside the purview of the 86th Amendment Act on the right to education. As the FOCUS study compellingly suggests, the first six years of life have a 'decisive and lasting' influence on a child's health, well-being, aptitudes and school-readiness. Poor nutrition and ill health in early childhood adversely affect children's preparedness for schooling and their learning ability when in school. Apart from health-related benefits anganwadis are also to provide

pre-school education services, including various stimulation and learning activities (Viswanathan, 2006). An effective system of child development services therefore encourages and facilitates school going.

Our more general point is that to assess the school-readiness of various states we have to pay concurrent attention to the availability and effectiveness of anganwadis, primary schools and upper primary schools. It is only an integrated approach to nurturing and schooling of children from early childhood to middle level (even stretching up to the secondary level) that can meaningfully serve the purpose of UEE. In the absence of any standard norm on anganwadi-primary school ratio, we look at the child (0-6 years)-anganwadi ratio in various states as a rough guide to their school readiness (Annex Table 4). In the country there are about 7 lakh anganwadis (FOCUS, 2006), although the effective coverage of ICDS remains limited and variable across states. Significantly, the states that are educationally active are comparatively more active on all the three fronts of pre-primary, primary, and upper-primary education than those which are educationally dormant.

States like Kerala, HP, Goa, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have made

significant strides, simultaneously, in pre-school services, primary and upper primary schooling, and even in secondary school participation. And not all in this league are having an equal level of economic prosperity. That is to say, wider school participation is not an automatic correlate of economic growth. Rather, there is an unmistakable trace of a policy consciousness and commitment in these cases to treat pre-school and school education as a totality; evidently they have not been forced to choose between pre-school education, elementary education, and high school education. There is, therefore, something distinctive to this league of educationally forward states; they have rather sensibly adopted a holistic and comprehensive view of school education.

The obvious next question, about fiscal crises and budgetary constraints, has to be addressed no doubt, and a fiscally feasible alternative has to be suggested. Also, for some states in the country, it appears as though to fulfill the SSA norms they have to 'square the circle', financially speaking. However, the paucity of educational finances need not be viewed as a reality permanently fixed and frozen, and foreclosed to any possibility of reallocation of resources from, say, defense to education. But surely allocations across social, economic and defense sectors are a subject matter of public debate and political negotiation; hence the fiscal 'feasibility set' for the education sector need not be treated as an absolute, non-negotiable, given.

REFORM BY RETREAT?

The apparently zealous policy drive to expedite the task of UEE has, rather strangely, taken a turn in the direction of a 'hands-off' policy on the part of many state governments. Such roll-back of policy support has taken two concrete forms. First, under the proclaimed fiscal pressure to 'square the [education] circle' and the urge to absorb the new school-bound rush among the hitherto disfavoured children, policy makers have increasingly opted for establishing alternate schools with para-teachers, in lieu of regular primary and middle schools. Second, there seems to be almost a studied policy silence and indifference vis-à-vis the new brand of the so-called 'budget' private schools, coming up mainly in urban areas. This amounts to public sponsoring of a kind of 'urban informality' in the near total absence of any regulatory frame to monitor their educational credentials (i.e. professional and financial competencies). The implications of such 'reform by retreat' for the enterprise of universal basic education, many claim, are ambiguous at best,

and harmful otherwise; by no means are they 'straightforwardly positive'.

Indeed, EFA interventions and initiatives have often taken the form of opening up of informal schools with contract teachers; in one estimate about 60 percent of the total increase in the number of primary and upper primary schools in the country has been of this kind. Admittedly, on some occasions these types of alternate schools are found to be having a closer link with the local community and functioning better than regular schools, under the aegis of home grown teachers sympathetic to educational needs of children of the poor, or of SCST communities (Pratichi Trust, 2002). A number of states both at the leading and lagging ends of the education spectrum – such as Goa and West Bengal – have appointed a large number of contract teachers at the primary (even upper primary) level. In West Bengal, in addition to a significant number of alternate schools at the primary level (known as Shishu Shiksha Kendras- SSKs), a number of MSKs have begun functioning to

provide upper primary schooling facilities to those passing out from the SSKs.

In the absence of adequate public resources and under pressure to meet the internationally set goals of UEE, states are indeed exploring various low-cost alternatives to regular schools. The experience of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan is a case in point. Incidentally, these two states are about to shed their BIMARU label, in light of their recent gains in several developmental indicators. Having started as low enrolment states they have managed to enroll a large number of children fairly quickly with relatively modest increases in public spending, primarily through, it is claimed, low-cost Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Shiksha Karmi programmes respectively. For example, according to a study by the World Bank (2004) on the EGS in MP, 'In the first year of the scheme's operation [i.e., in 1997] there were 40 new [low-cost] primary schools that opened everyday. It represented a community-centred approach to universalizing primary education in a quick, time-bound manner. By August 1998, MP had a primary school facility in every habitation. Thus within a short period of 18 months, the state eliminated the historical backlog of schools – at one-third the usual cost of establishing new school facilities' (World Bank, 2004:90).

Rampal (2004) adds a significant qualification to this line of thinking when she contends, 'Choosing local women from the community, as had been done for the remote and underserved habitations under the Shiksha Karmi Programme in Rajasthan, has its advantages, *but only when the selection and orientation processes ensure that the teachers are geared for this challenging task*' (2004:47, emphasis added). She then goes on to astutely suggest that, 'A matter of serious concern is that the SSK model, instead of being acknowledged as an interim short-term measure for disadvantaged children, is now being formulated as the *alternate mainstream* model in West Bengal, even for the middle school' (Rampal, 2004:49, emphasis original).

Thus, the promises of speedy cure for long-standing deficiencies that such educational arrangements present need to be juxtaposed against the challenges they pose to sustaining quality education for the underdogs of society. Contract teachers in such schools are paid one-fifth of the regular teacher's salary, and are usually imparted a brief training ranging from ten days to one month. Is this a system viable and adequate for quality elementary schooling? Similarly, is it an equity-enhancing move or the opposite? Of course, no one denies that states, especially those with a

huge educational backlog, are under severe financial constraints (although there is a room to qualify the severity and the allegedly non-negotiable nature of such constraints) as well as demographic pressures and that they have to exercise some degree of fiscal restraint. But the moot question is how low the low-cost should and could be. While there is nothing sacrosanct about the current level of the regular teacher's salary, the adequate level of the same must contain an idea of a sustainable livelihood.

In his recent study of elementary education in West Bengal, Tapas Majumdar (2006:276) astutely comments on the SSKs in the state, "Protagonists claim that tens of thousands of dedicated workers are prepared to teach at these salaries, and that many who have already joined the SSKs are in fact teaching the normal primary level courses very adequately'. But he suspects '...that the market cannot possibly provide a sustainable supply of teaching services on these terms for long'. He then goes on to quote from Sen's introduction to the recent Pratiche study (2002), 'The reliance on SSKs should not reduce the recognition of the urgency of reforming and enhancing the main avenue of primary education, viz., primary schools' (Pratiche Trust, 2002:276).

Several forceful voices have been

raised against sidestepping the 'main avenue' of children's schooling. Debates on the role of alternate schools in promoting the EFA goals still remain highly divided and ambiguous, yielding no clear judgement in favour of their professedly benign aims. In one reading, this is a policy move through which '...the government directly creates...segregation' (Rani,2006:454). Adopting such low-cost strategies, she asserts, '...will seriously hamper the already poor quality of elementary education'. 'This would lead to', she cites Kumar et al (2001:565), 'rapid weakening and general dismantling of the structure of primary education'.

Though not being a direct part of the operationalization of the SSA scheme, the other somewhat disconcerting fallout of the heightened urgency to expand schooling facilities has been the proliferation, in a climate of weak regulatory norms, of low fee-charging, self-financing schools, geared ostensibly to meet the unmet educational needs of the poor.^{xv} These so-called 'poor man's private schools' exist and function practically unregulated, their actual number and modus operandi escaping the interest and attention of education authorities and official statistics.^{xvi} Intriguingly, guesstimates on their size are sometimes available from unexpected quarters – from local publishers and booksellers who are in the business of

making hard sale of their 'wares' (that include books, study guides, and question papers for various school exams) to several of these new genre of schools. Due to the lack of any recognition, or even affiliation, these schools often arrange a tie-up with other recognized schools for dual enrolment of their students for examination purposes. Furthermore, several studies show that even some recognized and government-aided private schools run parallel unrecognized pre-primary and primary sections, which are funded from fees.

To be sure, monopolistic state provisioning of education has never been accepted in our country. Diversity in educational provisioning has always been acknowledged; as also the efforts of individual educationists and community groups. Historically private education preceded public education and later on private and government services providers have worked in tandem. Thus a pluralistic framework of education has been in place in the country for long. But what we observe nowadays is the proliferation of the small fee-charging budget category schools, indicating ostensibly the lack of a vibrant public school system and the swelling of parental demand for 'quality' (read private) education. But in the absence of any serious regulation and monitoring of these schools by the concerned authorities, it is hard to tell

whether these schools offer the best deal for the poor in the face of poor-quality government schools or a recipe for encouraging informalization of private schools on the one hand and dismantling of the government school system on the other.

In the contemporary discourse on governmental reforms, including reforms in the education sector, sometimes the focus is more on reduction of the direct role of the state than on how the government is to perform its regulatory role after it has withdrawn from the task of direct supply of services. Simply put, the demand for reform is often a euphemism for deregulation. As Kumar (2007:89) ruefully observes, '...as if the need [is] to restrain the state from interfering in the running of private institutions....The perceived risk is not that of unaided institutions exploiting the teachers, the students and their parents, but rather that of bureaucratic interference'.

If new forms of education service delivery are emerging in which the government has only an indirect role to play, why has only a scant attention been paid, within the policy circle and in public debate, on how this 'new' role is to be performed? Even after withdrawing somewhat from the direct delivery of educational services, can state governments abdicate a crucial responsibility to regulate the low-fee

charging budget private schools? Mehrotra et al (2005) point out that in several northern states 'unrecognized schools may not be even be registered by the government and therefore face no requirements or regulations whatsoever'. Why is there palpable 'policy silence' on this issue (Mooij, 2007)?

A handful of research studies on the low-cost variants of private schools contend that there is good reason for the government to harness the activities of the new education entrepreneurs, as one cannot be sure about the social outcomes of this kind of privatization. This may turn out to be a brand of marketization that poses a barrier to formalization, regulation and

quality control (Majumdar, forthcoming). Therefore, granting relief from regulatory requirements to small education entrepreneurs, ostensibly to facilitate the growth of the 'poor man's private school', will likely impede the spread of quality education among the deprived sections of society.

Our more general concern is about some of the visible trends whereby the proactive role of state governments in widening school participation tends to get diluted to the point of governmental under-activity, posing fresh hazards before the EFA enterprise. This kind of silent withdrawal of the state may result in greater segmentation in the school system than what currently exists.

EQUITY IN PUBLIC SPENDING

Egalitarian school reform – the very essence of the SSA programme – stands in need of equity in public spending. Here we do not, however, address in any detail the issue of public funding of school education, or the question of widely diverging fiscal capacity of various state governments in meeting the challenge of UEE. There are, in fact, nagging concerns about the growing fiscal pressures on several states in the country, precisely at a time when they are required to augment their educational investments manifold in response to the urge of EFA. Indeed, the SSA mission to promote enrolment and school completion cannot be actualized without increasing available resources in the form of better infrastructure and more teachers, among other things. Otherwise, the increased size of the student body and the correspondingly heavier load for teachers will end up creating ‘larger and more impersonal classes for students and a heightened possibility of blaming the new students for the decline in educational quality’.

By way of casting a fleeting glance at this vast topic, we briefly discuss two specific aspects of public expenditure, namely, a) irregular supply and underutilization of even the inadequate funds that are available; and b) inequality in public spending across localities even within the same state, district and block boundaries.^{xvii}

We discuss the question of fund flow and fund utilization with respect to the Centre’s financial assistance to state governments. Although the Centre’s share in total expenditure on elementary education is small, since the 1990s (and especially since the release of the SSA funds) this share has been growing – amounting roughly to 20 percent of the total expenditure on elementary education. In the latter half of the 1990s, Rani (2006) indicates, the Centre’s contribution has been more than 50 percent of the EE expenditure under the plan account. In contrast, state funds, in a number of cases, have remained stagnant, suggesting in turn that SSA funds are often taken to be a substitute, and not an additionality, to state resources.

What is really disconcerting is the irregular supply and underutilization of resources that are made available, at least on paper. The official approval of outlay may conform to SSA norms, but the actual release of funds is subject to the availability of financial resources in a particular year. According to the study mentioned above, in recent times funds released under the SSA scheme by the MHRD are in the range of 50 percent or less of the approved outlay. Moreover, there are palpable inter-state disparities in SSA fund allocations; ‘...the educationally backward states’, the author argues, ‘with an additional handicap of economic backwardness are further vulnerable even to get their eligible assistance from the GoI through SSA’ (ibid., p.438). Mehrotra et al (2005) express similar concerns when they report that in the fiscal year 2002-03 at the Central level, ‘SSA funds sanctioned were Rs.30.78 billion, but the amount released was Rs.11.72 billion’(Mehrotra, 2006: 32).

More disturbing still, in a climate of the overall lack of resources, there exist several instances of underutilization of the same. That some states are unable to spend the fund at their disposal, for a variety of reasons, even in the face of acute need for the same, that there is forced ‘surplus’ in the midst of real shortage of resources, points to a serious snag beleaguering the entire

centre-state fiscal arrangement. The rate of utilization of released funds has improved somewhat between 2003-04 and 2004-05 on an average, but regional contrasts in this respect are marked and many.

The possible reasons behind underutilization of resources range from administrative and procedural delays to uneven vigour of state-level entrepreneurship to expedite the release of funds through bargaining and lobbying. Consequently, quick distribution of funds in favour of educationally and economically solvent states is not uncommon. Mehrotra et al (2005) contend that in terms of receiving central support under the SSA scheme, the more deserving ones within the league of the educationally needy states are the relative losers as compared to others, reflecting in turn their uneven political clout with the Centre. As Rani’s (2006) careful analysis reveals, delays in the submission and approval of annual work plan and budgets, delayed release of central funds (in the initial years of the SSA very few states were receiving funds from the MHRD before the month of September in a financial year; more recently resources are being released a bit earlier – in the months of July or August); delayed release of state-level matching grant (the government of West Bengal has made available only 25 percent of its

share with a lag between three and four months); new procedures and guidelines (often rigid and inflexible) with the proliferation of new schemes; low utilization of funds in the previous financial year and its spillover effect, and the outpouring of bulk amounts in the last few months of the financial year are some of the administrative hurdles that explain the gap between available resources and their use. In short, it is appalling that in the face of acute problems of state finances, a sizable chunk of the central government grant is either not released or not utilized, raising deeper doubts about the uneven administrative or absorptive capacity of the various states.

Turning to fiscal and administrative processes within the state, we observe further delay in the transfer of funds from the district to sub-district levels, producing a substantial unspent balance at the district level. For example, in December 2004, in Kher district in UP the closing balance was Rs.29.5 million and Rs.13.5 million in the district of Unnao. Uniform financing norms across districts irrespective of their local and contextual differences, Rani (2006) convincingly argues, sometimes prove counterproductive. To take a concrete example, placing upper limits on particular heads such as construction work is aimed ostensibly at controlling corruption. In the absence of

such ceiling large portions of the available resources could perhaps have been spent on construction alone. But it is also possible to make a counter-argument that if districts are free to reallocate resources between various heads in tune with their respective needs and capabilities, there could have been a better utilization of resources. Local chains of accountability, activated through various decentralized forums, may serve better to check corruption than the vertical chains of command. We now turn to discuss the related issue of disparities in public expenditure and their effects. Indeed, some areas and some groups suffer more than others due to the inefficient use of inadequate funds, because of unequal distribution of the same.

To mention once more, we do not focus on average levels of educational spending in the states of India. Instead, we stress upon one important issue, namely, the inequality in public spending, often to the detriment of the disadvantaged. In more concrete terms, we discuss how the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) – a crude proxy for school quality – varies across rural and urban areas, across relatively developed and depressed neighbourhoods within the same state or district boundaries, indicating in turn inequitable public spending. PTRs skewed against rural areas, some claim, may be a result of

the lack of a rational teacher deployment policy, prompted partly by teachers' reluctance to serve in rural schools. Of course, teachers have a right to seek transfer to desirable schools; this makes it difficult for socially and economically depressed regions to retain experienced teachers. Therefore, trained and experienced teachers tend to be in those parts of the country that need them the least. This management approach to the problem of adverse PTRs in depressed regions could partly explain the phenomenon, but cannot fully answer the charge of clearly identifiable, non-random, patterns of distribution of educational resources in favour of better locations.

Before going into this discussion further, two general qualifications are in order. First, school quality remains an ambiguous concept, rendering it difficult to either measure or improve it. Second, in a number of studies, educational resources and public expenditure including infrastructure and teaching resources are not seen to be strongly associated with educational outcomes. Scholars like Hanushek (1997) for example persistently argue that expenditure and resource differences among schools are poor measures of quality differences. There are studies, however, that reach exactly opposite conclusions. In short, no unequivocal generalization about the linkage between educational inputs and

outputs is possible one way or the other. But there seems to be a loose agreement among scholars about the importance of a threshold level of infrastructure, instructional resources, and public spending in general, i.e. 'a minimum level of learning condition', that has to be satisfied for universal (elementary) school attendance and completion. In short, educational allocation matters. More concretely, for example, lowering of PTR at the elementary level is generally taken to be an indicator of improved school quality and is claimed to be associated with higher rates of school attendance and completion (World Bank, 2004:86). 'This suggests', the study concludes, that '...both school attendance and primary school completion would likely benefit from school quality improvements in the form of reduction of the pupil teacher ratio'.^{xviii}

The rural-urban disparity in PTR is palpable in many parts of the country, indicating a widespread rural-urban divide in the allotment and circulation of teachers. A survey based research in seven educationally challenged states of the country by Mehrotra et al (2005) indicates '...a clear difference in the provision of teachers in rural and urban areas. By and large, there is a predominance of schools with more than three teachers in urban areas.' This is particularly true of the educationally disadvantaged states. It

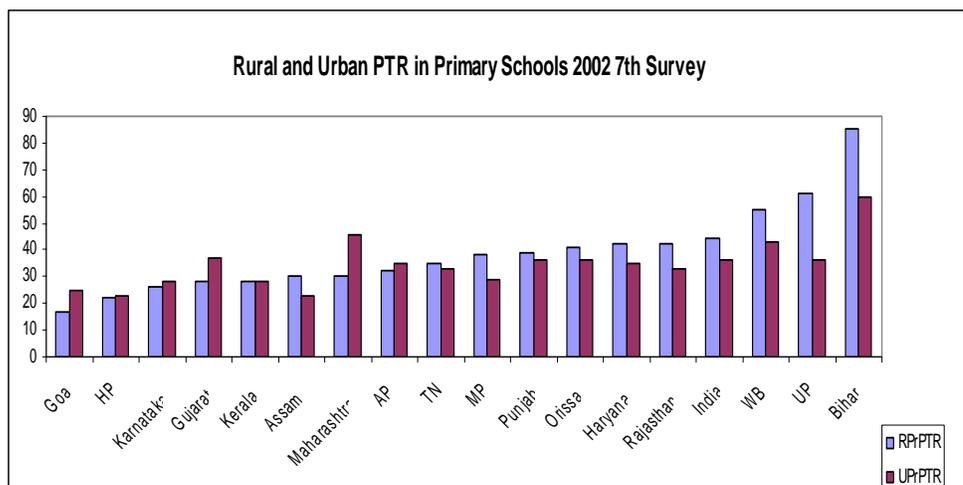
is as though rurality is being punished. This further implies that per-child spending is ‘...much higher in high performing states than in educationally backward states’ (Mehrotra et al, 2005). It may be well to mention one related point here in passing, namely, that due to the decline in the total fertility rate and hence in the absolute number of children at the elementary stage, the educationally active states appear to be enjoying a ‘demographic bonus’ such that even with the current level of educational expenditure it is possible for them to improve per capita expenditure and school quality. Such demographic dividend is unavailable to the educationally dormant and comparatively populous and poorer states which therefore tend to fall into the trap of a quality-quantity trade-off under a persistent demographic pressure.^{xix}

It is as though neighbourhoods themselves are socio-economically stratified; in marginal areas schools are relatively more starved of teachers. Between rural and urban areas, between privileged and low-income neighbourhoods, even within a district there exist large variations in the stock of teachers. Rana’s study (2006) of a

number of selected districts in West Bengal, for example, is revealing. In West Medinipur district of West Bengal, there were 6 percent single teacher schools in 2005. This is roughly similar to the state average. But upon closer scrutiny of block-level data, the author shows that in Belpahari – a so-called backward, ‘marginal’ block – there were 23 percent single teacher schools in the same year. In the comparatively developed block of Nandigram, on the other hand, there was no such ‘unfortunate’ (read single teacher) school. Rampal (1997:282-83) expresses a similar concern about lopsided public spending when she remarks, ‘Ironically, these “impoverished” schools are located in rural “backward” regions with low literacy rates, serving “deprived” children who actually need even more time and attention from the teacher, since they have no parental support at home’.

Following on this line of argument and drawing on available data, we compare the PTR in rural and urban areas at the primary level and find wide variations in this respect across states (Annex Tables 5 & 6).

Figure 4.1

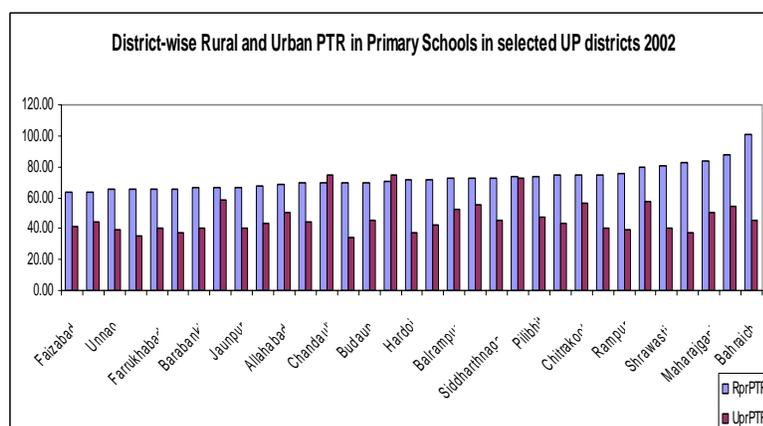


Source: NCERT, 2005.

Progressing further downward, we compare the PTR in rural and urban schools at the district level. As an illustrative exercise, we focus on the districts of two selected states of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.^{xx} Unsurprisingly, there are wide gaps between PTRs in rural and urban primary schools in these districts. The district averages in UP are 62.89 percent and 46.43 respectively. The corresponding averages in West

Bengal are 54.71 and 45.56 respectively. In some districts the rural PTR is so high that we should not be surprised to discover that these areas face real difficulty in attracting and retaining children in school. In UP 33 out of 68 districts have a PTR (in rural primary schools) which is higher than the district average. In Kheri district, for example, it is 87 and Bahraich it is as high as 101.

Figure 4.2



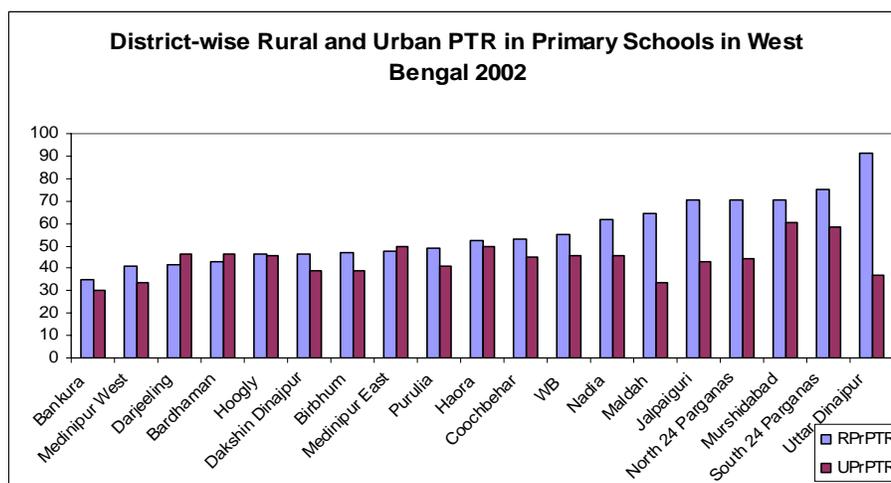
Source: NCERT, 2005.

Similarly, in the district of South 24 Parganas in West Bengal there are as many as 75 students per teacher in rural primary schools; this figure is 91 in Uttar Dinajpur.^{xxi}

Next we take female literacy and urbanization in the district as two crude measures of its relative prosperity (or the lack thereof) and then correlate those with the PTR in rural primary schools in the district.^{xxii} Disturbingly, both female literacy and the degree of urbanization in the district seem to be significantly and negatively correlated with PTR in rural primary schools of that district.^{xxiii} This implies that the system does not allocate more teacher resources to schools and areas that have greater needs for the same. On the contrary, schools in poorer areas also suffer from poor teacher supply.

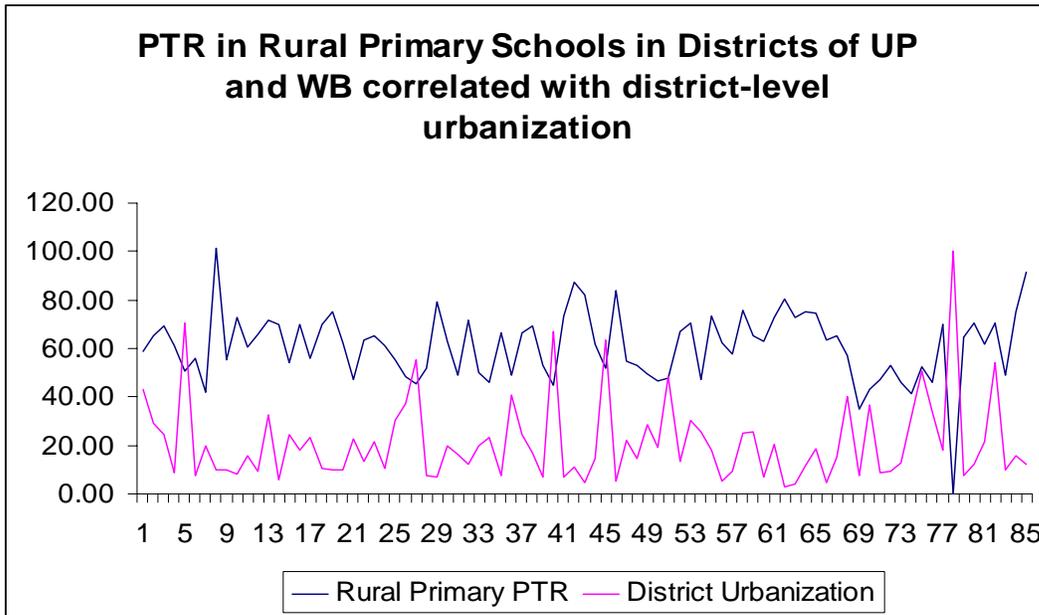
Clearly, we need differential spending in favour of the special educational needs and priorities of poorer regions. In other words, deprived areas and groups must receive more than per capita share of educational resources if equality of opportunity were to be granted. In a seminal work, Betts and Roemer (2006) estimate that to equalize future earning opportunities for white and black children in the USA would involve spending ten times as much on the education of blacks, per capita, than on whites. There is an urgent need to carry out similar kinds of research in our country to assess the quantum of additional public spending in favour of the traditionally disadvantaged groups that would be required to level the educational playing field.

Figure 4.3



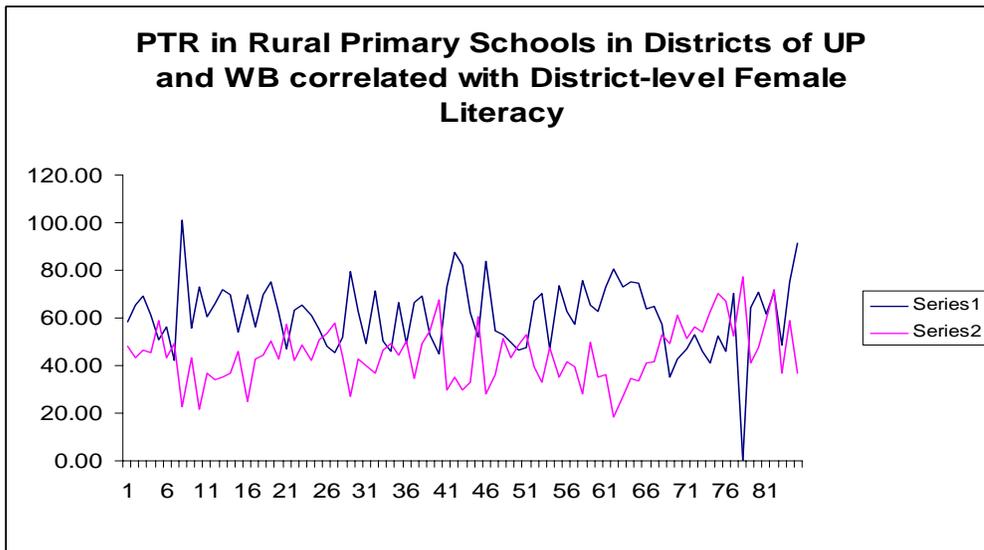
Source: NCERT , 2005.

Figure 4.4



Source: Calculated from NCERT 7th Education Survey, NCERT, 2005.

Figure 4.5



Source: Calculated from NCERT 7th Education Survey, NCERT, 2005.

PUPIL-TEACHER RELATION: HIERARCHY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND AUTONOMY

The above discussion on the PTR pushes our enquiry further to raise a more basic question about the significance of a congenial pupil-teacher relation – an affinity that lies at the heart of the entire teaching-learning process. Indeed, a kind and motivated teacher, in a non-hierarchical classroom, can truly excite, inspire and engage young minds in the pursuit of knowledge, insight and understanding. Therefore, the role of teachers, sympathetic teacher attitudes, and teaching can hardly be over-emphasized.

In practice, however, classrooms are often a hierarchical setting in which the teacher, keen to control and discipline, is engaged in simply transferring information from 'the jug to the mug' – i.e., to passive and docile 'receptacles' called students. '...regimentation of children in authoritarian classrooms' by teachers, and their 'obsession with routine qua routine' have been severely critiqued by several leading educationists and experts (Bowles and

Gintis, 1976). Furthermore, classrooms are also a site where class divisions between the teacher and the taught may also become stark. A number of scholars compellingly argue that teachers (commonly from the middleclass/privileged family background) are not only domineering but also discriminating vis-à-vis the new generation of students (mostly from hitherto excluded groups) with whom they have an increasing social distance. The lack of adequate work culture among teachers, and teachers' apathy and lack of sympathy for new school entrants are thought to be symptomatic of their social locations and class orientations. To deal with their indifference, at times even hostility, to the educational needs and aspirations of the new class of learners, one suggestion is to introduce various decentralization reforms and organizational changes aimed at involving parents in the running of schools, thereby making teachers accountable to the local community.

Another approach urges us to take a somewhat more sensitive and sympathetic view of teachers, as they themselves are professionally ignored by the education system. As several scholars argue, the relationship of authority and control between teachers and students often get replicated in the relationship between administrators and teachers. Admittedly, sometimes teachers are neglectful of those students who belong to the downtrodden sections of society. In turn the school system neglects and relegates them to the lowest echelon of education bureaucracy; they are expected to implement decisions taken elsewhere. They are treated more as street-level bureaucrats than as education professionals. The education system impedes teachers' effective participation in setting educational priorities, and rigidly restricts their freedom of action. Although the teacher is an authority figure inside the classroom, her professional authority and autonomy are negligible when we take the education system as a whole.

Drawing on elements from both these strands of argument, we try to suggest here that both (class) power and (professional) powerlessness are the defining features of the teaching profession today, particularly at the level of school education. Hence, to improve teacher initiative, effort, and affinity to students would require

increased teacher autonomy and accountability, and hence the notion of 'accountable autonomy'^{xxiv}. Without going into any detailed analysis of this idea, we briefly touch upon four specific points: a) decentralization reforms in education and local monitoring of teachers; b) the role of a 'New Centre' in building capacities of local education committees; c) greater professional autonomy of teachers in core educational activities; and d) professional network among teachers.

Accountability means something more than the standard vertical lines of command and control that run from administration to teaching faculty to student body.^{xxv} Indeed, several recent reform initiatives pertaining to school management and administrative/political decentralization indicate a shift from bureaucratic control to control by the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and more generally by the local community (Leclercq, 2007). The idea is to encourage the involvement of parents and the local community in the running of schools and to make teachers accountable to parents. Some of the new institutional changes along these lines include the setting up of Village Education Committee (VEC), the School Management Committee (SMC), the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and the Mother Teacher Association (MTA) etc. Interaction between parents and

teachers is expected to occur in these institutional spaces; as a result teachers are expected to become sympathetic and responsive to parental educational demands.

Unfortunately, however, several studies across the country point out that these new institutions have made marginal differences to the involvement of parents in the running of schools. For example, Leclercq's study in selected northern states demonstrates that a large number of parents, irrespective of their social background, have little idea about the composition and functioning of PTAs and MTAs. Even teachers sometimes do not recall the names of current members of these committees. To be sure, there are inter-state variations in the effectiveness of these monitoring mechanisms. But, there is a general gloom regarding their level of activity and performance. The VECs and SMCs are sometimes seen to be involved in the construction and maintenance of school buildings etc., but not providing much input in academic matters. Similarly, '...parents are without effective control of teachers, while the involvement of panchayats seems minimal' (Leclercq, 2007:477), except perhaps in the recruitment of contract teachers.

It is as though administration, management and infrastructural issues are given priority over academic

matters by these participatory forums. It is possible here to envisage a role for a 'New Centre' (i.e., new role for supra-local officials) that would come in the aid of building capacity of these local committees. In the changed environment of educational decentralization, while several school-related decisions and academic choices need to be decentralized right up to the school level, the centre should not disappear or abdicate its own responsibilities in the enterprise of UEE (Majumdar and Mooij, 2006). The 'central party' – be it the central or the state government – will indeed have to figure out what kinds of resources are necessary to actively begin to develop the capacity of community based educational bodies. Otherwise, we will keep on inventing policies, causing further institutional proliferation; but in the absence of any agency to keep up the pressure these committees will remain as ineffective institutional vestiges, as 'paper committees'. The new center can take up the role of both developing their skills and exerting constant pressure on them to participate and perform. For example, supra-local officials can provide training for VEC/SMC members in matters of school finances or in monitoring school meal programmes.

Here is a case of such a joint initiative. The newly introduced mid-day meal programme in West Bengal has been

gradually taking its roots in different parts of the state after having experienced various initial troubles (especially the nagging 'middle class' skepticism about its worth), particularly because a handful of reform-oriented officials at the state government level have made several timely interventions, issued useful general guidelines from time to time, taken a number of midstream corrective steps, and above all have genuinely encouraged regional variations in the programme, extending strong support for diverse local level arrangements for the supply of cooked meal in schools across the state.^{xxvi} While there has been a genuine push from this 'new Centre' for the local actors to own up this programme and the associated responsibilities, the former has also adopted several innovative strategies to ensure local accountability. For example, phone numbers of concerned state-level authorities were notified in several newspapers, requesting concerned citizens to contact them in case of any complaints with the school meal programme in their localities. Such fine balancing of the local and the supra-local should perhaps be more vigorously attempted in other core areas of primary education, namely, in curriculum design, textbook selection, student evaluation, pedagogic innovations and so on.

At the heart of all this discussion is of course an urge to improve teaching, i.e. to better nurture children's creativity and imagination. To that end, a lot of attention has been paid to the need to reduce teacher absences; indeed this is considered fundamental to reaching the EFA goals. Without denying its importance, we however would like to focus on the urgency to deepen teacher involvement in core educational activities. Because even when physically present, teachers may not be adequately encouraged or challenged to take up her basic professional responsibilities such as designing curriculum, choosing textbooks, doing experiments with pedagogy, and above all evaluating her own students following an appropriate method of assessment. On all these counts elementary level teachers remain straight jacketed. Therefore, ensuring teachers' professional development and improving their capacity and autonomy in these respects are important EFA imperatives. As Carnoy (2004:9) astutely comments, 'Without improving teacher skills, including subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills, it has proved difficult to improve teaching, and without better teaching it is difficult to improve student academic achievement'. And we would like to add that in this enterprise teachers' autonomy is a focal variable; without enlarging teachers' freedom of action and responsibility in schooling

matters it is not possible to 'increase the freedom of the mind of the child', the mission that lies at the heart of Tagore's vision of education, briefly mentioned above.

The ground reality is of course quite different. Although several experiments and initiatives in teaching practices and pedagogies have been recently introduced under the aegis of the 'Centre', these are more often than not fixed packages set from above, leaving little room for professional autonomy and responsibility of teachers. That teachers are a professional cadre and therefore are to be given the challenge and the impetus to engage themselves in such core educational activities as designing curriculum, writing and choosing textbooks, professionally interacting among peers about effective teaching methods, setting question papers and evaluating their own pupils etc. have not entered the policy consciousness of supra-local bodies in a major way. And because teachers have not been adequately motivated and challenged to think along similar lines, they themselves are resigned to play the role of a mere (and rather unenthusiastic and unthinking) implementer of a top-down package.

DIETs, and Block/Cluster Resource Centres are supposed to provide academic and professional support to teachers. Here we do not discuss

sufficiently how far these bodies assist in teachers' professional development. However, a few available studies indicate that they are not enjoying the health they were expected to enjoy (Leclercq, 2007). Also, experienced and committed teachers are often recruited as resource persons, coordinators and supervisors and hence give up teaching. In the process some schools are deprived of their best teachers. As the author astutely observes, 'The reward for good teachers in terms of career is to become a CAC and stop teaching. In this respect, administration is still valued more highly than education' (p.492). Kumar (2007:78) articulates a similar concern when he argues, 'In general, the bureaucracy has managed to keep new institutions like the DIET under tight control of the kind that schools have been used to' (p.78).

Resource centres are perhaps of some help. But these centres do not provide much opportunity for regular interaction among peers and colleagues. Teachers undergo intermittent training, usually confined to an annual meeting organized by the BRC. The scope for learning from peers is limited in these teacher training centres. In contrast a few existing peer networks in different parts of the country, facilitating regular exchange of ideas and pedagogic practices among teachers, prove to be more effective medium for their

professional development. Drawing on knowledge and practices of teachers, on their `wit and wisdom', these forums strive to nurture teachers' professional autonomy and responsibility even within an otherwise rigidly centralized environment. Indeed, there are heartening examples of teacher involvement and academic creativity, reflecting their voices and views as members of a professional cadre. Their ideas do get converted into `pedagogical reality'. An extensive field based study by Sherry Chand (2006) demonstrates how a number of decentralized, grassroots, professional forums contribute to peer-learning. Under the leadership of a few innovative teachers, these networks facilitate sharing of experiences among teachers, lead to the development of new teaching material as well as

pedagogic practices. Such forums that nurture teachers' academic freedom, in tandem with well-run local monitoring networks, will likely stimulate teachers' accountable autonomy. School reforms as well as institutional reforms at higher administrative levels therefore must embolden teachers' voice and agency in the EFA enterprise (Batra, 2005). Doubts are often raised about how far such localized teacher networks can be scaled up for more extensive effects. A quick response could be that these grassroots experiments and initiatives may still be successful being small if they are part of a bigger network. And the new Centre could play this critical role of coordination – acting `big' as an overall facilitator and enabler and not as a remote control operator issuing directives in a high-handed manner.

EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT^{xxvii}

Improving school quality and furthering educational achievement of students is thought to be a fundamental imperative of EFA, especially in low-income regions and among disadvantaged children. However, to mention once more, there is no simple way to measure school quality and there is no agreement among scholars in this matter. To quote from the UNESCO report (2005) on the EFA mission, 'Whether a particular education system is of high or low quality can be judged only in terms of the extent to which its objectives are being met. Evaluations will consequently differ according to whose objectives are deemed decisive. Those of governments, international organizations, teachers, families, and pupils are by no means always in accord' (p.223). However, there is a general consensus, the Report continues, about two basic objectives of education, namely, the improvement of cognitive skills, and the inculcation of values and attitudes necessary for good citizenship.

Similarly, student achievement is an illusive concept that defies easy measurement. Is educational achievement more meaningfully gauged in adult life through indicators such as employment, earnings and citizenship roles or within the school cycle itself? At the school level too, student performance is not easy to judge and is contingent upon the set of educational processes and outcomes that are considered important. It is even more difficult to determine how to improve the results. In short, ways of securing better quality and results are 'neither straightforward nor universal'. However, learning achievements are primarily measured through standard test scores.

Our discussion here does not dwell on various achievement tests and their results; rather we focus on the need to increase equality of educational attainment, that is to say, to reduce the inequality in the number of years of

schooling attained by individuals. Here again, as in the rest of the paper, our focus is on rural areas and traditionally disadvantaged social and religious groups.

Surely, attainment and achievement are linked. As UNESCO report clearly states, "...how well students are taught and how much they learn can have a crucial impact on how long they stay in school." (2005:28). How much they learn is usually assessed through exams and test scores. Those students who fail these exams are made to repeat grades; and they often drop out of school. Hence, repetition and dropout data are routinely used as an indicator of educational quality. Carnoy however perceptibly observes that these could be misleading indicators of the quality of the school system. Suppose there are more than hundred pupils in each of several first grade classrooms; there are "...not simply enough or big enough classrooms in the school to accommodate those pupils were a high percentage of them to continue on to second, third, or fourth grade....The available space in those schools does not permit all students to complete all the grades...in those....schools *there is an expectation, even a need, to fail pupils.* Even in cases where there is room for everyone, there may not be an upper primary...or lower secondary school...

available in walking distance' (p.3) (emphasis added).

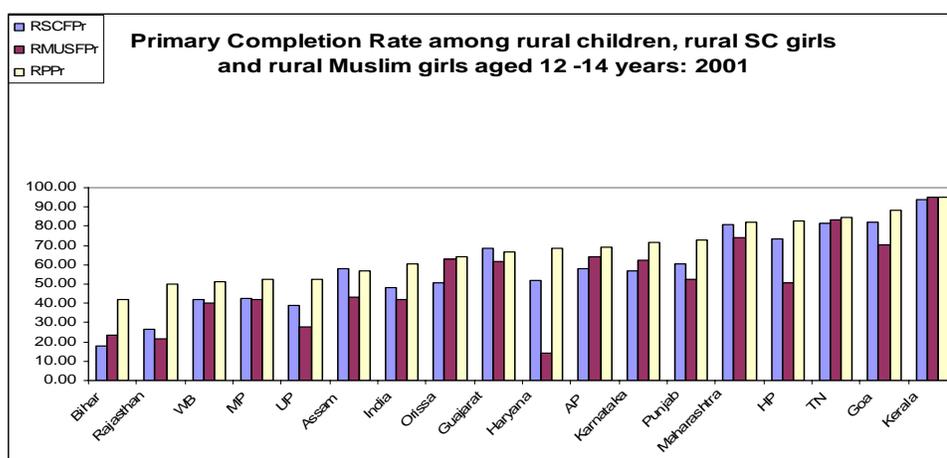
Following Carnoy, it could be argued therefore that school attainment can also act as a good measure of quality, as it may capture the twin notion of minimum level of learning condition as well as the minimum level of learning achievement. Furthermore, educational attainment is a better measure of 'persistence' even against odds. To be sure, this is not to dismiss the value of test scores altogether. 'Those who score higher go further in school'. But international findings suggest that it is difficult to increase test scores of average students; the focus therefore has to be on improving the educational attainment of low-performing, low-income, and socially disadvantaged children. 'Keeping them in school for eight years, even if they achieve proficiency of the 6th grade level" is an important quality imperative. Increasing the number of years that rural children have available to go to school, that is to say to increase their 'school life expectancy' (UNESCO, 2005), could be taken as a broad EFA target for our country. This is indeed a crucial point to remember particularly because sometimes we tend to get obsessed with test scores. Carnoy convincingly argues that the education system can '...improve the performance of low-performing groups mainly by making the *conditions* of their schools more like

the schools attended by higher performing children' (Carnoy, 2004:8) (emphasis added). Significantly, more and better resources for resource-starved schools will have a positive impact on both student *achievement and attainment*.

Following on the above argument, we calculate and sketch out the primary school attainment/completion rates and middle school completion rates among 12-14 year olds and 15-17 year olds

respectively.^{xxviii} We focus on educational attainment of rural children, and among them especially on Dalit and Muslim girls, as the latter have historically suffered from worst forms of social exclusion. Our aim is not so much to talk about large differences in completion rates across income and social groups as to underline wide inter-state differences in attainment levels of the historically marginalized social and religious groups.

Figure 6.1



Source: Calculated from Census 2001, Gol, 2001.

In Bihar only 18 percent of Dalit girls in the primary school age seem to have attained that level, whereas in Kerala this percentage is as high as 93. This widely yawning gap suggests that in educational fortunes Dalit girls in Kerala have marched far ahead of their unfortunate Dalit peers in Bihar. Similarly, in Rajasthan only 21 percent

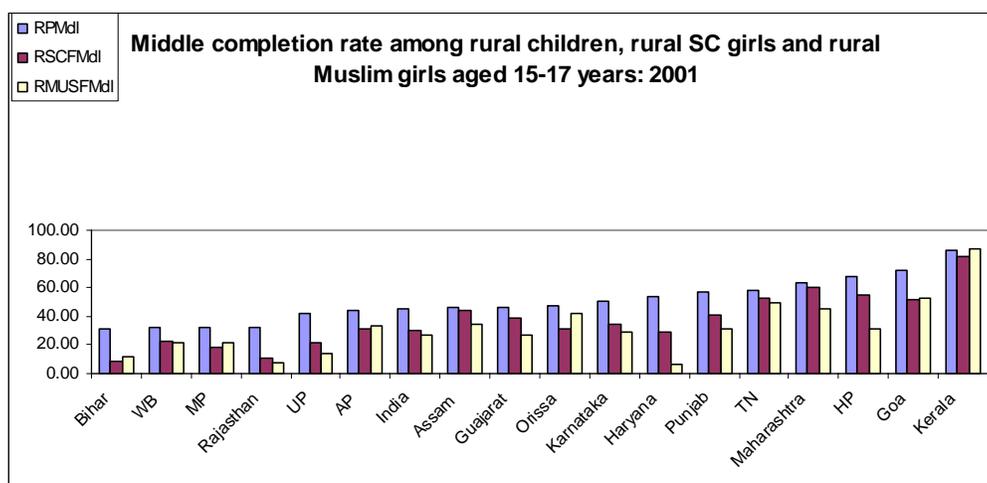
of rural Muslim girls of primary school age have completed primary education. The corresponding figure for Kerala is 95 percent. It is as though within the same national boundaries, Muslim girls inhabit two different educational universes. This, above all, is a statement about strikingly divergent social, political and policy commitments

of the constituent states of the Indian Union.

In general, middle school graduates among the underdogs of society are far fewer in number as compared to those finishing primary school. The curve showing state-wise middle school completion rates among rural adolescents, including Dalit and Muslim girls is, therefore, much flatter. Inter-state variations remain stark. What is really disturbing is the very low level of middle school completion among young girls of Dalit or Muslim origin in quite a few states of the country. In Bihar, UP and Rajasthan, having a sizable proportion of Muslim population, less than 15 percent of young Muslim girls

in rural areas (as also in Haryana) have finished middle school as per 2001 Census data. The all-India average is 27 percent. On an average Dalit young girls in rural areas have fared a little better in that they have survived till the middle level in slightly higher proportions. Still, in five states this figure remains below 25 percent. Clearly, in these areas to achieve the UEE goal within 2010 or even 2015 looks highly daunting. More importantly, this further underlines the need to set context-specific and disaggregated targets for different parts of India, which is a continent-like country consisting of states that are often larger than many independent countries.

Figure 6.2



Source: Calculated from census 2001, GoI., 2001.

DISAGGREGATED TARGETS AND SUSTAINED EFFORTS: SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It is time to make a few remarks about the mission mode of UEE policy and practice. First, while it is essential to set some broad targets and time lines for the fulfillment of EFA goals, excessive target orientation runs the risk of running out of steam. EFA campaigns could be potentially useful if they could shape a kind of a society-wide movement and public understanding in favour of a democratic social norm to educate every child. But we should guard against such campaigns being reduced to only ad hoc and piece meal schemes and frequent policy shifts (some of which are enervating and not energizing), creating in turn huge institutional debris. Also, perverse incentives are formed by the target mode itself. For example, under the pressure of uniformly set top-down directives, district and sub-district officials are at times almost forced to overstate the number of enrolled students, because expenditure allocations to schools and districts are often based on the number of enrolled students.

Furthermore, different regions and states in the country face different sets of initial social, economic and political conditions, having a significant bearing on their respective educational performances and capabilities. So each region demands its own particular strategy for educational expansion and improvement. The assumed uniformity of needs across states that the current policy approach implies has to be revised so that disaggregated targets could be set whereby programmes and time lines could be designed according to the contextual specificities of individual states (Kainth, 2006).

In particular, educationally challenged states will find it really hard to attain the MDG, let alone the SSA targets operating under a much tighter time frame (universal primary completion by 2007 and universal elementary schooling by 2010). A recent study by the World Bank (2004) has projected increases in net primary attendance rate in educationally lagging states only

by 27 percentage points by 2015 – well short of the mark of 50 percentage points required to attain the MDG. Hence, these states will miss the deadline as far as the goal of universal net primary enrolment is concerned. But perhaps, as the World Bank study helpfully suggests, these states should put in concerted efforts to ensure that all children aged 6-11 years are in school by the stipulated time frame irrespective of level. It is, however, important to underline that educationally depressed states can fulfill the EFA promises only if they are not restrained, through various expenditure conditionalities, to hire sufficient teachers. Limits on public expenditure quite ironically ensure that schooling cannot be improved. In short, increased public spending on elementary education – and that too differential public spending – is necessary.

This acknowledged and with measured optimism, it could perhaps be argued that the following are the feasible, disaggregated targets that the country could aim to attain within a reasonable time frame: *transition to wider secondary schooling in the educationally forward states, universal primary completion in the educationally improving states, and universal primary enrolment and attendance in the educationally dormant states*. Stated more generally, since educational

starting points in different regions are so different, and correlatively prospects for the achievement of EFA goals so divergent, there are bound to be different policy priorities for states in different stages of educational development. For the educationally enervated states in particular, it is important to set targets that are challenging yet feasible. This is the general drift of the argument developed here.

This cautious tenor of the discussion does not by any means seek to dilute the importance of either the commitment to the EFA goals or the concrete policy measures taken up to actualize these goals. For example, we have discussed above the promising results evident in terms of both increasing educational participation as well as improving school infrastructure. Still, some major trouble spots persist. We highlight some of the main points discussed above.

- Universal net primary enrolment and retention by 2015 is hard to achieve in several parts of the country.
- The enrolment and retention of children – particularly of rural girls – at the upper primary stage appears to be the most disturbing trouble spot, especially in the poorer states.
- Sometimes targets lead to

contradictions in practice. For example, while universal elementary education is the professed goal, due to paucity in public supply, the school system can hardly afford to encourage all primary school graduates to make the transition to the post-primary level.

- There are regional contrasts in educational participation, not only between states, but also within them, between districts and blocks. However, Indian states show consistently positive records so far as the educational performance of the 'privileged' is concerned. In contrast, divergence among states is striking when we look at the educational record of the vulnerable sections of the population. Therefore, at the risk of being partial, we have put one theme in the foreground, namely, the relative success of the various states in bringing the underprivileged sections of society into the school system.
- One way to improve the educational fortunes of students, particularly of the underprivileged children, is to keep them in school for eight years, that is to say, to improve their 'school life expectancy'. Stated differently, educational attainment, rather than simply test scores and educational achievement, may serve as a better measure of educational performance and persistence against odds.
- The educationally forward states have made significant strides, simultaneously, in pre-school services, primary and upper primary schooling, and even in secondary school participation; they have adopted a holistic view of school education. This implies that it is only an integrated approach to nurturing and schooling of children from early childhood to the middle level (stretching up to the secondary level) that can meaningfully serve the purpose of UEE.
- There is some kind of a policy silence about the regulatory responsibility of the government vis-à-vis the so-called budget private schools, catering mainly to the have-littles. Similarly, there are unmistakable signs of policy neglect of government schools in backward regions, as evinced through inequitable public spending. To state more generally, the rolling out of governmental activities that the EFA reforms envisage seems to get thwarted by the rolling back of the government from some crucial tasks that it alone can discharge. Unless these policy contradictions are addressed, we may continue to face

the paradoxical situation of reform and retreat.

- At the heart of egalitarian educational reforms must lie an urge to improve teaching, and correspondingly to deepen teacher involvement in core educational activities. Improving teachers' capacity and autonomy in designing curriculum, choosing textbooks, and doing experiments with pedagogy and methods of student assessment are important EFA imperatives.

It is time to indicate the limitation of the present exercise. The reader may expect a greater degree of certainty and absoluteness than is manifest here in the discussion of both the current educational ills as well as their solutions. Some concrete cases of analyses and proposals for solution have indeed been discussed above in some detail. However, this alone is not the thrust of our paper. We have tried to argue that given the complex structural forces underpinning our education system, positing solutions alone without a deeper analysis of the various deficits and shortcomings may be counter-productive in the long run. This concern, therefore, lends to the treatment a certain degree of tentativeness that is perhaps unavoidable at the present stage of our understanding.

Hence, it is better not to be dogmatic about targets, nor about solutions. While a sense of urgency must accompany any serious attempt at expanding and improving schooling, targets qua targets may become counter-productive. UEE is a mission that may never be over, as it requires sustained efforts. Let us ask what educationists and practitioners would do if the pre-set targets are achieved, say by 2015. Would they go out of business? Not quite! We need to recognize that teaching-learning is an ongoing process; as McCaskell (2005) astutely observes, we may never get it fully right. With concerted effort, we may hope to do better; but 'there are always new things to learn, there are things that have to be rethought and revised; there are mistakes that have to be corrected'. For example, with growing migration and urbanization in the country and the consequent settlement and displacement of slums, and growing social inequalities, schooling in cities seems to throw up new challenges for the idea and practice of education. 'New research, new experiments, and new challenges will all push for new directions' for thinking and action. Hence there is no room for policy certainty. The enterprise of education is such that 'the race to equity', to borrow McCaskell's pithy phrase^{xxix}, may never be over.

Annexes

Table 1

	1999-2000	2004-05
Primary School	642000	767520
Upper Primary School	198000	274731
Teacher in Primary School	1919000	2310800
Teacher in Upper Primary School	1298000	1439146
Enrolment in Primary School	113.61 million	131.69 million
Enrolment in Upper Primary School	42.00 million	51.67 million
Ratio of Primary to Upper Primary School	3.2	2.8
Public Expenditure (as % of GDP)	3.77	3.74 (2003-04)

Source: MHRD, reproduced from the 11th Plan Working Group Report, Gol. 2007.

Table 2: School Infrastructure 2005-06

	Primary School (%)	Upper Primary School (%)
No Building	3	2.4
Student-Classroom Ratio*	41	33
No Toilet	44.6	15.3
No Drinking Water	15.1	4.8

*This is an indicator of adequacy or shortage of classrooms. It is estimated that additional 6.37 lakh classrooms will be needed in primary and upper primary schools. Again, SCR varies widely across states: it is 84 in Bihar, indicating a serious deficit in the availability of classrooms, 62 in UP (varying widely across districts with 38 in Kanpur Nagar and 90 in Rampur), and 15 in HP.

Source: DISE data, reproduced from 11th Plan Working Group Report.

Table 3: Progress Towards Key SSA Targets

	Targets including 2005-06	Achievement up to 31.3.2006		%Cumulative Achievement	
		Comp	IP	Comp	IP
Opening of New Schools	157967	129893		82%	
Teachers Appointed	772345	587388		76%	
Construction of:		Comp	IP	Comp	IP
a. School Building	120629	71143	31587	58%	85%
b. Additional Classrooms	329690	155814	176225	47%	99%

Enrolment in EGS Centres	87 Lakh Children	63 Lakh Children	71%
% Children receiving free Textbooks	6.14 Crore	5.35 Crore	87%
Functional Academic Resource Centres	7422	7201	97%
Block Level	70735	66140	93%
Cluster Level			
Teachers trained	3053285	2347017	77%

Reproduced from 11th Plan Working Group Report, GoI. 2007.

**Table 4: Pre-primary, Primary and Upper Primary Schooling:
An Integrated Approach?**

States	Child-anganwari ratio	Primary/Upper Primary ratio	Education Expenditure Rupees Per Child (6-14)
AP	187	2.53	1849
Assam	176#	3.25	3526
Bihar	276	3.60	1384
Gujarat	198	1.50	2376
Haryana	246	2.08	2666
HP	108	2.69	5917
Karnataka	178	1.97	2809
Kerala	149	1.83	4294
MP	217	2.77	1255
Maharashtra	218	1.84	3331
Orissa	157	2.88	1816
Punjab	200	2.14	3118
Rajasthan	297	2.81	2625
TN	171	2.66	2892
UP	307	3.63	1333
WB	198	5.30	2087

Reference Year: 2004, 2005, 2005-06

Note : # : As on 30.11.2003.

Source: Column 2- 0-6 Children from 2001 Census and Number of Anganwaris, Lok Sabha, Un-starred Question No. 1829, dated 20.7.2004; column 3- DISE data; column 4 - Knowledge Commission Report

Table 5

UP	RprPTR	UprPTR	%SC and ST	(%)Urban Population	Female Literacy
Agra	58.62	69.02	21.8	43.3	48.3
Aligarh	65.26	37.8	21.2	28.9	43
Allahabad	69.03	49.96	21.7	24.5	46.4
Ambedkar Nagar	61.09	49.25	24.4	8.9	45.3
Auraiya	50.59	34.21	27.7	70.5	59.1
Azamgarh	56.12	43.78	25.7	7.6	43.4
Baghpat	42.11	36.72	11	19.7	49.2
Bahraich	101.32	45.38	14.8	10	22.8
Ballia	55.63	61.08	16.5	9.8	43.2
Balrampur	72.78	52.91	14.6	8.1	21.8
Banda	60.32	33.03	20.8	15.9	36.8
Barabanki	66.07	39.99	26.9	9.3	34.3
Bareilly	71.93	41.99	12.7	32.9	35.2
Basti	69.77	33.91	20.9	5.6	36.9
Bijnor	54.12	39.47	21	24.3	46.1
Budaun	69.99	45.66	17.1	18.1	25.1
Bulandshahr	56.02	34.62	20.2	23.1	42.5
Chandauli	69.71	74.32	24.3	10.6	44.1
Chitrakoot	74.9	56.73	26.3	10	50.3
Deoria	62.19	47.68	18.2	9.9	42.5
Etawah	47.2	32.76	23.4	23	57.4
Faizabad	63.34	41.29	22.6	13.5	42.3
Farrukhabad	65.23	40.08	16.5	21.8	48.7
Fatehpur	61.27	49.48	25	10.3	41.9
Firozabad	55.36	40.53	18.9	30.3	51
Gautam Buddha Nagar	48.15	53.29	16.3	37.4	53.7
Ghaziabad	45.56	51.63	18	55.2	58
Ghazipur	51.94	44.89	21.4	7.7	44
Gonda	79.19	57.01	15.7	7	27.2
Gorakhpur	62.85	46.07	22	19.6	42.9
Hamirpur	48.97	31.47	22.8	16.6	40.1
Hardoi	71.49	37.17	31.4	12	36.8
Hathras	50.05	44.73	25.2	19.8	46.3
Jalaun	46.2	50.54	27	23.4	49.2

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Jaunpur	66.62	39.87	21.9	7.4	44.1
Jhansi	49.11	36.02	28.2	40.8	50.2
Jyotiba Phule Nagar	66.36	58.36	17.3	24.6	34.6
Kannauj	69.42	44.71	18.4	16.7	49.2
Kanpur Dehat	52.82	31.94	24.8	6.9	54.6
Kanpur Nagar	44.84	38.05	16.5	67.1	67.5
Kaushambi	73.16	73.01	36.1	7.1	29.8
Kheri	87.63	54.42	26.8	10.8	35.4
Kushinagar	82.39	37.46	18.1	4.6	29.6
Lalitpur	61.92	38.25	24.9	14.5	33
Lucknow	51.9	98.78	21.4	63.6	60.5
Maharajganj	83.84	50.18	19.6	5.1	27.9
Mahoba	54.84	47.25	25.8	21.9	36.4
Mainpuri	52.78	34.31	19.3	14.6	51.4
Mathura	49.47	41.67	19.6	28.3	43.4
Mau	46.38	67.97	22.7	19.4	48.7
Meerut	47.68	39.89	18.4	48.4	53.1
Mirzapur	67.17	42.94	26.9	13.5	39.3
Moradabad	70.34	74.35	15.9	30.5	33
Muzaffarnagar	46.9	40.26	13.5	25.5	47.8
Pilibhit	73.37	47.79	15.3	17.9	35.1
Pratapgarh	62.52	37.23	22	5.3	41.5
Rae Bareli	57.42	35.69	29.9	9.5	39.3
Rampur	75.73	39.71	13.4	25	27.9
Saharanpur	65.15	35.78	21.7	25.8	50
Sant Kabir Nagar	62.76	44.51	21.2	7.1	34.9
Shahjahanpur	72.82	55.78	17.7	20.6	36.3
Shrawasti	80.35	40.07	18.8	2.8	18.6
Siddharthnagar	73.01	45.33	16.5	3.8	27.1
Sitapur	74.94	40.76	31.9	11.9	34.6
Sonbhadra	74.48	43.75	41.9	18.8	33.7
Sultanpur	63.61	44.46	22.2	4.7	40.9
Unnao	65.05	39.4	30.6	15.2	41.6
Varanasi	57.34	73.15	13.9	40.2	53
UP	62.89	46.43			

Source: Calculated from the 7th Education Survey, NCERT, 2005.

Table 6

WB	RPrPTR	UprPTR	%SCST	(%)Urban Population	Female Literacy
Bankura	35.15	30.25	41.6	7.4	49.4
Bardhaman	42.83	46.64	33.4	36.9	61
Birbhum	47.26	38.77	36.2	8.6	51.5
Coochbehar	52.98	44.68	50.7	9.1	56.1
Dakshin Dinajpur	46.15	38.82	44.9	13.1	54.3
Darjeeling	41.35	46.37	28.8	32.3	62.9
Haora	52.46	49.44	15.8	50.4	70.1
Hoogly	46.14	45.35	27.8	33.5	67.2
Jalpaiguri	70.17	42.62	55.6	17.8	52.2
Kolkata	0	47.03	6.2	100	77.3
Maldah	64.46	33.26	23.7	7.3	41.3
Medinipur East	47.46	49.81	0	0	0
Medinipur West	40.77	33.73	0	0	0
Murshidabad	70.64	60.12	13.3	12.5	47.6
Nadia	61.75	45.49	32.2	21.3	59.6
North 24 Parganas	70.55	44.12	22.8	54.3	71.7
Purulia	48.73	40.8	36.6	10.1	36.5
South 24 Parganas	74.91	58.06	33.3	15.7	59
Uttar Dinajpur	91.43	36.75	32.8	12.1	36.5
WB	54.71	45.56			

Source: Calculated from the 7th Education Survey, NCERT.

Table 7: All-India attending school 2004-05

	Rural				Urban				Rural+Urban	
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Persons	
	6-11	10-14	6-11	10-14	6-11	10-14	6-11	10-14	6-11	10-14
SC	86	84.8	81.4	72.9	90.4	86.9	85	78.1	84.4	79.9
ST	83.6	78.6	75.9	66	89.2	88.1	91.6	85.7	80.8	74.3
OBC	88.7	88	83	76.2	92.2	88.8	91.9	87.7	97.2	83.8
OTHERS	92.1	89.6	90.3	85.3	95.6	91.5	94.2	92.1	92.5	89.1
ALL	88.3	86.8	83.5	76.7	93.2	89.6	91.8	88	87.4	83.7

Source: NSS, Gol, 2006.

Table 8: Children attending School in 6-11 age group

	NSSO		Census 2001
	1993-94	1999-2000	70.60
India	72.00	83.30	81.70
AP	83.30	81.60	62.70
Assam	56.30	52.10	44.30
Bihar	89.21	90.78	90.00
Goa	79.80	84.10	77.50
Guajarat	82.20	86.70	77.50
Haryana	93.12	97.64	90.50
HP	85.10	88.70	78.60
Karnataka	96.20	95.10	93.90
Kerala	63.10	72.90	70.80
MP	86.00	91.30	86.10
Maharashtra	64.90	71.80	70.30
Orissa	83.70	89.50	80.00
Punjab	57.90	75.00	71.60
Rajasthan	88.50	94.00	89.80
TN	62.50	74.70	61.60
UP	70.50	78.50	70.80
WB			

Table 9: Children Attending School (in percent)

States	NFHS I 1992-93	NSSO 2004-05			
	Poorest 6-14	SC 5-14	ST 5-14	Rural Female 5-14	All 5-14
Bihar	37.8	48.8	55.8	57.4	65.2
Rajasthan	41.4	71.5	71.4	68.1	78.0
Punjab	42.7	84.8	94.5	88.3	89.0
AP	45.7	87.2	82.2	82.4	87.6
MP	46.1	76.1	63.7	69.9	78.4
UP	48.4	75.5	57.3	73.0	77.5
India	50.0	78.3	73.8	76.7	82.1
Karnataka	50.7	81.4	84.3	84.0	88.3
WB	52.7	84.0	67.6	81.4	82.9
Gujarat	55.2	86.9	79.2	77.9	85.6
Orissa	55.2	79.0	65.6	75.3	80.2
Haryana	60.5	76.7	75.3	81.2	87.2
Assam	61.5	89.8	89.6	86.8	87.1
Maharashtra	67.1	88.8	71.2	87.4	89.1
TN	71.7	95.0	90.3	93.9	96.1
HP	72.4	93.3	92.8	93.6	95.0
Goa	77.4	91.9	100.0	96.4	94.6
Kerala	88.7	95.2	90.9	98.3	97.6

Source: Column 2 – Filmer and Pritchett 1998; Columns 3-6, NSS, Gol. 2006.

Table 9A:NFHS 3: Attendance Ratio of Elementary School Age (6-14) Children, All-India, 2005-06

Age group	Urban	Rural	Total
Male			
6-10	87.6	83.6	84.6
11-14	82.8	78.6	79.9
6-14	85.4	81.5	82.6
Female			
6-10	88.3	78.5	81.0
11-14	80.8	66.4	70.4
6-14	84.9	73.4	76.4
Total			
6-10	87.9	81.1	82.9
11-14	81.9	72.6	75.3
6-14	85.2	77.5	79.6

Source: IIPS & Macro International 2007.

Table 10: 12-14 at least primary completion Census 2001

	RPPr	UPPr	RSCFPPr	RMUSFPPr
AP	69.10	82.10	58.00	64.10
Assam	56.60	78.70	57.90	43.50
Bihar	41.80	64.50	18.00	23.60
Goa	88.30	87.60	82.00	70.30
Guajarat	66.60	81.90	68.30	61.90
Haryana	68.40	77.80	52.00	14.50
HP	82.70	89.30	73.70	50.90
Karnataka	71.60	83.60	56.80	62.10
Kerala	94.80	95.90	93.70	95.00
MP	52.40	76.20	42.50	41.90
Maharashtra	82.00	86.60	80.70	73.90
Orissa	64.40	80.60	50.50	62.80
Punjab	72.60	79.00	60.80	52.20
Rajasthan	50.10	69.60	26.80	21.50
TN	84.70	88.20	81.30	83.60
UP	52.70	63.10	38.90	27.50
WB	51.00	68.50	41.70	40.10
India	60.30	77.60	48.10	41.80

Source: Calculated from Census 2001, Gol., 2001.

Table 11: 15-17 at least middle completion Census 2001

State	RPMdi	UPMdi	RSCFMdi	RMUSFMdi
AP	44.20	68.60	30.80	33.40
Assam	45.80	68.30	43.60	34.00
Bihar	31.50	59.80	9.00	12.10
Goa	72.30	74.90	52.00	52.30
Guajarat	45.90	67.30	38.90	27.10
Haryana	53.60	70.60	29.30	6.00
HP	67.80	81.70	55.20	31.60
Karnataka	50.40	69.10	34.00	29.10
Kerala	85.60	87.90	82.00	86.70
MP	32.50	63.50	18.00	21.80
Maharashtra	63.80	73.20	60.20	45.20
Orissa	47.20	70.60	31.10	41.70
Punjab	57.20	71.00	40.50	31.20
Rajasthan	32.50	58.80	10.70	7.90
TN	58.00	69.10	53.20	49.20
UP	42.10	56.90	22.00	13.90
WB	32.40	54.00	22.70	21.00
India	44.80	66.10	30.00	27.40

Source: Calculated from Census 2001, Gol., 2001.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ Education for all in the age group of 6-14 years is not just a Millennium Development Goal for us, but more importantly a fundamental right, enshrined through the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002.

ⁱⁱ The deadline for EFA set by the Millennium Development Goal however is 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ The education discourse in a Third World country setting is replete with many ambiguous, even skeptical, sentiments about the effects of education on the individual as well as on society. However, there is also evidence that quality education has significant effects on individual income, economic growth, fertility and health, among other benefits (World Bank, 2004).

^{iv} Bowles and Gintis (1976) ask the next obvious question: 'Does this mean that a more equal school system has no role to play in creating a more equal society?' And they answer emphatically but with measured optimism: 'Not at all. The reduction of economic equality is ultimately a political not an economic question.....a more equal school system will not create a more equal society simply through equalizing the distribution of human resources. It will only create *the political opportunity for organizing a strong movement* dedicated to achieving greater economic equality.' (emphasis added)

^v The thesis of the conservative function of education – i.e., the reproduction of class divisions and legitimation of elite domination – is partial, as it ignores education's potential role in social transformation.

^{vi} The paper suffers from the limitation arising out of the neglect of many other important themes and problems in elementary education such as the curriculum and pedagogy issues, organizational and financial aspects and so on.

^{vii} Needless to say, the assumptions about various educational interventions as having positive effects on school attendance and completion, and on the reduction of gender, class and caste disparity are subject to their interactions with other social and economic forces.

^{viii} Although there has been an accelerated process of closing the infrastructural gaps, low completion rates of large civil works programmes are also evident, raising further concerns about fund flows, their releases and utilization (the 11th Plan Working Group Report, also see Annex Table 3). Similarly, although several steps have been taken in spreading primary education, interventions sometimes are slow and limited, lacking in energy and drive, as we shall discuss below with reference to inequalities in public spending, the issue of pre-schools and school readiness, and quality concerns.

^{ix} Gross drop out rates, the Eleventh Plan Working Group Report (GoI., 2007) indicates, for classes I-V, and classes I-VIII show declining trends as well as gender parity. Adjusting for repetition and transfer of children, reconstructed School Education Statistics data show the following somewhat encouraging results: at the primary stage the dropout rate has declined from 40.3 percent in 1999-2000 to 28.49 percent in 2004-05. The corresponding figures for the upper primary stage are 54.5 percent and 50.39 percent respectively. The retention of children at the upper levels of elementary schooling clearly appears as a formidable challenge before the EFA project. Also, gender disparity in upper primary enrolment is disturbingly high in states like Bihar. Gender disparities between districts within a state like MP are also glaring: 3 percentage point difference in Katni and Balaghat, while 29-30 percentage points in Jhabua and Sheopur districts. Considerable differences across various data sources however continue to puzzle us. According to DISE data, for example, after taking care of promotion and grade repetition, at the primary stage the average dropout rate is as low as 12 percent in 2004-05. Again, inter-district variations are quite palpable: in 2004-05, the 11th Plan Working Group Report highlights, 115 districts have dropout rates below 5 percent, and 98 above 20 percent.

^x DISE data available from NUEPA, as cited in the 11th Plan Working Group Report, indicate that in 2004-05, at the primary and upper primary stages the proportion of under-aged children is 8.46 percent and 11.11 percent respectively; the corresponding figures for over-aged children are 5.8 percent and 8.05 percent respectively.

^{xi} Lewin (2006) helpfully discusses some problems surrounding targeting. He argues that not all of 'targets generated from desirable wish lists' can be achieved simultaneously, as there are likely to be trade-offs. We also try to indicate below that targets may lead to contradictions or even perversities in practice, unless we address the underlying complex structural conditions. To quote Lewin (2006:25), 'Target setting and indicative benchmarks have a value but...they can also distort some aspects of the educational development process.'

^{xii} It is well to remember that enrolment, attendance and pupil survival rates are highly sensitive to the choice of the reference age category.

^{xiii} According to the 11th Plan Working Group Report, "...there are 96 districts in the country that had a ratio of primary to upper primary schools of more than 4:1, indicating a very inadequate provisioning of upper primary schools" (p.47).

^{xiv} To accelerate the progress of closing the gap between primary and upper primary schools, some states have gone in the direction of setting up informal middle schools, which have their own array of problems.

^{xv} Reliable data on private school enrolment among the poor are difficult to come by. The recently published National Knowledge Commission report refers to the MIMAP survey that reveals the following findings about the school-enrolled children living below the poverty line: 8 percent of the rural school going children among the poor (in the age group of 5-10 years) attend private schools; the corresponding proportion for urban areas is as high as 36 percent.

^{xvi} In a recent study of selected northern states, Leclercq (2007) describes this largely unnoticed, almost silent, policy support for low-fee charging private education centres as one of the major policy changes in India after 1991. The continued neglect of public schools in these states coupled with growing educational aspirations of the underdogs in the society has 'resulted in an implicit decision to privatize the supply of primary education'.

^{xvii} The following discussion on utilization of funds draws on Rani (2006).

^{xviii} Again, the impact of class size - 'the number of pupils a teacher has to teach' - on education outcomes remains a matter of debate; it depends on many other things, including pedagogy. But one thing is clear: 'very large class sizes are not conducive to adequate learning. Especially first-generation learners probably need smaller class sizes' (UNESCO, 2005).

^{xix} Private communication with Sankar (in May 2007) clearly suggests that the states having low school enrolment or attendance rates are also the ones that spend less per child and per enrolled child of elementary school age (i.e. 6-14 years).

^{xx} UP and West Bengal are two of the five states (Bihar, MP and Rajasthan being the other three) that lodge 69% of out of school children in the country. West Bengal has five districts having more than 50000 children out of school in 2005-06 (11th Plan Working Group Report). If all school age children enroll in school in these states, with the present teacher strength classrooms will burst at seams. In other words, if we take potential pupil-teacher ratio, that will be much higher than the actual pupil-teacher ratio. In short, these states are not fully school-ready.

^{xxi} These findings are based on slightly dated figures of 2002 drawn from the 7th Education survey. Both MHRD and state education departments claim that in more recent times a sizable number of teachers have been recruited. Therefore, the PTR has perhaps declined in the post-2002 period.

^{xxii} We club the data for West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh in order to arrive at a decent number of statistically meaningful data. There are 84 observations.

^{xxiii} The correlation coefficient between PTR in rural primary schools in the district and district female literacy is -0.678; the corresponding figure between PTR in rural primary schools in districts with district-level urbanization is -0.538. To be sure, we do not claim any causal connection here and admit that the observed correlation could be due to another intermediate variable.

^{xxiv} This notion is borrowed from Fung (2001).

^{xxv} In this connection, we do not at all discuss the role and functioning of the standard system of school inspection, except to state that school inspectors are usually required to visit a huge number of schools in a year, rendering inspection to be just a routine affair. Indeed, inspection registers look suspiciously uniform from year to year (Leclercq, 2007).

^{xxvi} Prodded by a recent Supreme Court order several Indian states have introduced cooked mid-day meals in elementary schools. Several scholars compellingly argue that the mid-day meal programme could have a major impact on child nutrition, school attendance, and by extension on the fate of UEE. One major lacuna of the paper is its scant analysis of this scheme and of the linkage between universal mid-day meal and UEE. Only one

point that we wish to mention in passing is that states like Tamil Nadu that have taken an integrated approach to child nutrition, pre-school services, and school education have gained a lot more education mileage than those states that have taken only a narrow and truncated view of elementary schooling. For very useful analyses of the mid-day meal programme, see Dreze and Goyal (2003), Viswanathan (2006), and Rana (2006).

^{xxvii} Discussion in this section draws on Carnoy (2005).

^{xxviii} The 12-14 age group (15-17 age group for the attainment of elementary education) includes the ideal age of completion – 12 (15), and the normal range of ages for completion. Our calculations are based on 2001 Census data; to calculate the completed level of education (i.e. at least primary schooling or at least middle schooling) of an age cohort, we use the total reference population as the denominator, and not just those enrolled among them. Therefore, completion rates of ever enrolled children in reference age groups will be higher.

^{xxix} Tim McCaskell's recently published book is titled *Race to Equity: Disrupting Educational Inequality* (2005).