Tanjavur

Local Education Report

CASTE, CLASS AND SCHOOL

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES
BANGALORE

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Tanjavur, Tamilnadu

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES
Indian Institute of Science Campus
Bangalore 560 012, India

Published by
National Institute of Advanced Studies
Indian Institute of Science Campus
Bangalore 560 012

Copies of this report can be ordered from:

The Controller
National Institute of Advanced Studies
Indian Institute of Science Campus
Bangalore 560 012
Phone : 080-3604351
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ISBN 81-87663-34-0

NIAS Special Publication 12-2002

Typeset & Printed by
Verba Network Services
139, Cozy Apts., 8th Main, 12th Cross
Malleswaram, Bangalore 560 003
Tel.: 334 6692

This brief report is part of a study on primary education conducted by the Sociology and Social Anthropology Unit at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. Field research was conducted between October 1999 and November 2001 in the following six areas: Jaunpur Block (Uttarakhand), Jaipur (Rajasthan), Khategaon Block (Madhya Pradesh), Bangalore (Karnataka), Tanjavur (Tamil Nadu), and Chirala (Andhra Pradesh). A composite report on all the areas will be available separately.

The objectives of this local education report (LER) are to share the findings of the study with members of the communities in which the research was conducted and to generate discussion on issues related to primary education. Therefore, this report is primarily descriptive of the condition and problems of schools and schooling. We hope that in each area members of the community, teachers, elected representatives, parents, education department personnel and others interested in promoting elementary education will find the report useful.

K. Lalitha conducted the field research between October 1999 and March 2000. T. Ramesh helped initiate the field study and Sarita Tukaram helped with the second phase of field work and in compil-

ing and writing this report, Savita Sastri processed the data, and Kala Sunder edited the report. Thanks to all of them and special thanks to all the children, both students and those out of school, the principals, teachers, parents and other community members who participated in the study, for their time, patience and inputs.

Support for research was provided by the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) Bangalore and the Spencer Foundation (Chicago). Funds for developing the Local Education Report were provided by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), of the Canadian High Commission, New Delhi.

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2002

CASTE, CLASS AND SCHOOL

At the national level, Tamil Nadu's record in promoting primary education ranks it above the national average. Such an advantage is based on the significant contribution made by the British colonial administration and by the region's elite groups and families to education institution-building. In addition, the mid-twentieth century and contemporary periods have witnessed widespread social and political movements which have enabled many of the historically disadvantaged caste and class groups to access basic education. Successive state governments have combined increased financial allocation with supplementary incentives to all children to enable a literacy rate for Tamil Nadu which in 2001 stood at 73.47 per cent, with 82.33 per cent for men and 64.55 per cent for women[1]. In addition to incentive schemes such as free mid-day meals and the provision of uniforms, textbooks, slates and bus passes, Tamil Nadu

[1]Census of India, 2001.

was the first state to promulgate the Compulsory Elementary Education Act (1994) which placed the onus on the state and parents to send children to school. As a result of such measures, not only are schools functioning in most of the settlements in the state, but enrolment levels are also high (97 per cent). In addition, literacy levels for SC and ST groups have also been above the national average levels[2], although the difference between the literacy rate of the general categories and that of the SC and ST groups within the state persists.

Despite the state's overall achievements in primary education, the problems of child labour and enrolment and achievement levels at the secondary and high school levels have not been addressed[3]. Though the government acknowledges that about four lakh children are out of school[4], not much attention is being paid to the fact that dropout rates after primary school continue to be high and that child labour persists among such dropouts and out- of-school children. The glaring shortcoming in the state's programme is the failure to provide quality education in government schools. Further, despite its slogan of wanting to halt the mushrooming of private schools, the continued growth of such private, especially English-medium schools, in the state remains unchecked and complicates the trends in the elementary education sector[5].

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[2] Status of Elementary Education in Tamil Nadu with specific reference to Education for All. Education Department, Tamil Nadu. 2001.

[3] "Progress Towards Education for All: The Case of Tamil Nadu, P. Radhakrishnan and R. Akila. *India Education Report: A Profile of Basic Education.* Ed, R. Govinda. NIEPA: New Delhi. 2002.

[4] *Ibid*

[5] In November 1999, the Tamil Nadu Government issued a Government Order that all schools had to have Tamil as the medium of instruction up to primary school. State-wide protests led to the withdrawal of the order and subsequently there has been silence on the language issue.

The problems caused by enabling access to elementary education without assuring the quality of education, the indirect encouragement given to private, English-medium schools, and the subsequent school differentiation are evident in Tanjavur. More specifically, a study of the different types of schools will indicate not only the trends in the schooling patterns but will also enable us to raise questions related to assessing elementary education. Why has there been a decline in the functioning of government and municipal schools? What accounts for the mushrooming of private, unaided schools? What implications do the increasing variety and hence differentiation of schools have for the realisation of the idea that schools should be common public institutions that can ensure a common experience for children of different backgrounds? Such questions are pertinent if we are to go beyond looking at elementary education as a numbers game. In addition to ensuring that all children are in school, it is important to assess a schooling system in terms of the kinds of schooling experience that it offers to children of different socio-economic backgrounds.

In an attempt to answer such questions we studied three schools in Tanjavur town, each representing one of the dominant types of schools. One was a primary municipal corporation school, another a private school within the same ward, and the third an aided primary school. Our objectives were to assess the education opportunities of children from economically and socially disadvantaged communities and also to understand trends in school education which have implications for the differential opportunities of children.

With these in mind, the researcher, K. Lalitha, observed the three schools, their functioning and orientation, interviewed the children, teachers and parents over a period of eight months (September 1999 to April 2000), and observed the classroom transactions. Additional data on the district was collected and interviews with past students and parents were conducted in 2001.

TANJAVUR: LITERACY AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Once a centre for administrative activities and a well-known temple town, Tanjavur is now a bustling business town that draws on the prosperity of the agricultural belt in which it is situated. The contribution of different ruling elites and the Christian missionaries to elementary education has left Tanjavur well-endowed with educational institutions. In addition to the number and variety of schools in the town there is a regional university, and a number of government and private colleges and institutions cater to the growing demand for professional and higher education. In 2000, Tanjavur district had a literacy rate of 76.07 per cent with a male literacy rate of 85.45 per cent and a female literacy rate of 66.95 per cent[6]. In comparison with other districts, Tanjavur is ranked as a middle range area in its literacy levels. In fact, our survey of areas in the vicinity of the municipal school revealed that out of 698 children between the ages of 6-14, only five children had dropped out of school. And most of the children (93.65 per cent) who were surveyed said they were not

[6] Census 2001

involved in any kind of production activity and were not employed in any full-time or part-time work.

But the trends in the growth of schools in the city reflect the trends in the state's elementary education itself, where there is a decline in the number of municipal, corporation and government schools and an increase in the number of private, English-medium schools. There are altogether 57 primary and elementary government-linked schools in the town, including (in 2000) 16 municipal schools, 39 aided schools of which 9 are run by religious minority institutions and 30 by non-minority institutions. One school is run by the government and one by the state Adi-dravida welfare board[7].

Though data about private schools are not available at the district and town education office, the state data indicates that there are 68 private, unaided schools in the town[8]. Again, though data for the actual growth of private schools are not available, it is generally accepted and evident that private schools have mushroomed in the town since the mid-1990s. For one, it may be argued that the growth of private schools is a result of the decline in the condition and functioning of government, especially municipal, schools. On the other hand, it can be argued that the new demand for English-medium primary and secondary education has led to the decline in the demand for, and hence the centrality of, government schools. That there is a link between the decline of the government or municipal schools and the growth of private schools is evident from the fact that even as private schools have increased during1995 - 2000, three municipal schools

[7] Office of the Assistant Elementary Education Officer, Thanjavur (Urban). September, 2000.

[8] Status of Elementary Education in Tamil Nadu with specific reference to Education for All. Education Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, 2001.

were closed down in 1999. Though lack of adequate numbers of students was cited as the official reason, municipal councillors and teachers noted that it was the decline in the condition of these schools, their inadequate infrastructure and the poor enrolment levels, that led to the schools being declared uneconomical and subsequently being closed down.

To assess this perspective and to indicate the implications of the growth of school differentiation, this study details the functioning of three schools - a municipal school, an aided school and a private school, which provide a contrast to the first. While the municipal and private schools are located in the same ward and cater to children of the same age group, the aided school is in another ward but draws children from different parts of the town. In detailing the differences in the functioning and orientation of the three types of schools, the factors behind their deficiency or success will be highlighted and the implications of such school differentiation will be discussed.

The Decline of a Municipal School

Although the municipal school is located in a large and well-built building and housed within a compound in a busy area of the town, there is a dull and dysfunctional air about it. Classes are held in a desultory fashion, and the children are often restless. Yet, this was not always so. Established in 1903, the school was once a model school, well known in the town for its educational achievements. But, it has deteriorated substantially; not only is the functioning of the school sporadic with high teacher absenteeism, the student strength has been declining and there are now only four teachers for the five standards.

Far from being a model school, it is now in a state of decay with few of the neighbourhood children attending it and with only the very poor enrolling their children in it.

In many ways the dismal condition of the municipal school testifies to the trends in educational institution-building. Rather than being administered by local authorities and elected representatives, and catering to children from socially and economically diverse households, government schools are treated as marginal institutions with little or no attention bestowed on them. The municipal school in Ward I is, in fact, representative of the condition and future of all government and municipal schools.

Although located in a central area of the town, the municipal school has a declining student and teacher body. In 1973, there were nine teachers and 360 students in Standards I to V, and in 1983 there were 250 students. In contrast, in 2000 there were only four teachers, one male, and three women teachers, for a student body of 156 in Standards I to V. In 2001, only 16 children enrolled for the first standard while the total enrolment was 105. Two reasons are cited for the absolute decline in the enrolment levels. One, the closure of a hostel for Muslim children is said to have resulted in the decline of children from this hostel attending the school. Second, the decline in the fertility level in the state, and hence in the number of children, is cited as one of the reasons for the decline in enrolment. However, in addition, there are several administrative and educational factors that account for the decline of the school over the past two decades.

Maintenance and Management

The large, well-built school with three spacious rooms is not adequately maintained and the toilet is used by the public during off-school hours. With water being supplied for only two hours of the day, maintenance of the toilets and providing drinking water is a problem. The small area between the primary school and the high school serves as the playground for the children. Several of the government's incentive schemes are implemented in this school. Children receive a mid-day meal and a regular supply of free uniforms, slates and textbooks. Yet, despite these incentives and the government's allocation of four teachers, the school is in a dismal state.

Several factors account for this decline. For one, the separation of administrative and financial responsibility for the school leaves it largely unaccountable to any specific authority. Since 1996, when teachers complained and went on strike against irregular and inadequate salaries, the payment of teachers' salaries is made by the state government and the Department of Education is responsible for this. However, the administration of the school continues to be vested with the municipality which allocates five per cent of its municipal tax revenue to education. Yet, the municipality is unable to maintain the school, supervise its functioning and assess the teaching-learning carried on there. As the Chairperson of the municipality noted, "the municipality has no real connection with the schools". The end result is that the teachers receive salaries from a source to which they are not accountable and the authority to which they are accountable pays little or no attention to them. This has led to the teachers being largely

unsupervised and unaccountable. Though the Assistant Education Officer (AEO) is required to visit and inspect the school six times a year, there is little by way of actually supervising and improving the schools and/or making teachers and/or corporators responsible for it. Since even the parents are not able to engage with issues related to the school, it is largely left to the teachers, who in turn, are not sufficiently motivated, to run the school in an effective manner.

Teachers' Attitudes

Perhaps what is most striking about the school is the disinterest and indifference that most of the teachers exhibit. Although the same person has been the headmaster of the school for the last fifteen years, he shows little or no sign of interest in the growth and improvement of the school. Despite the relatively high salary scales and the holidays made possible by the schooling system, most of the teachers seemed to derive little or no satisfaction from their vocation. All the teachers recognise that there is much scope for improvement in the condition and quality of the school. Yet, there is little or no reflection on their own actions and attitudes and most of the problems are attributed to the students' social background and to their parents' attitudes.

Although the teachers are aware of the competition that private, English-medium schools pose to them, they attribute the presence and functioning of the private schools to the parents' demand for English-medium education. One teacher noted that she prefers to teach in the government school since, "What I am doing here is service. I do not want to teach in a big school. Children in English-medium schools

only mug up. Their general knowledge is nil. Tamil-medium schools encourage overall development of the child."

Two of the high school teachers at the municipal school said that the primary school was not sufficiently disciplined. When asked to compare the municipal and private schools they said, "Private schools are any day better than municipal schools. The social background of children attending municipal schools is very bad. Some parents are criminals. They are not interested in looking after their children's education." Both the teachers interviewed said they send their children to English-medium private schools because they believe that the English medium facilitates higher studies.

One of the teachers, who has been at the school for four years, places the blame for the decline in the school's functioning on the very characteristics of the community from which the children are drawn. Conceding that earlier the school was better, she notes, "Children come to this school because we give free books, uniforms and food." Another teacher, who is more sensitive to the social and economic backgrounds of the children, asserts that the growth of the private schools is a result of the fact that, "Now parents want their children to address them as 'mummy' and 'daddy'. They want their children to know English. So they send them to private schools." Speaking about the parents she says, "Most of them are poor and uneducated. Some are even criminals. The children are mostly from the Scheduled Castes but they are very good academically."

Echoing many of the sentiments and views of these women teachers, the headmaster also associates the children's performance with their social background. Asked about the children who attend the municipal

school he says, "Only poor children come here. The wealthy and healthy children go to private schools which teach English and computers." He further adds, "All children are below standard. There are no bright children here".

Such attitudes largely account for the fact that the teachers see children as incapable of learning and therefore make little or no effort to teach them. Their own social backgrounds, mostly middle class and upper caste, and their training which does not sensitise them to such issues, account for the fact that they fail to recognise their own responsibility to teach these children. Their indifference, hostility and even the deliberate neglect of the welfare and development of these children account for the high absenteeism and the generally low achievement levels of the children. That most of the teachers do not seek to reach out to these children is also evident in the fact that a significant proportion of children who were interviewed (68.25 per cent) said that their teacher had not visited their homes.

Community-school Relations

Most of the children in this school are from the lower socio-economic and caste groups. A majority of the children come from the working class settlement located behind the school. However, the government scheme which provides free bus passes to children has brought about 30 children from two villages 12-15 kilometers away from the town, to this school. Most of the children are from Scheduled Caste groups such as the Thoti, Parayar, Pallar and Chakliyar. A smaller percentage are from the Most Backward Caste (MBC) group such as the Ottan,

while some are from the caste group Kallar who are identified as a Backward Caste. Reflecting the state's high literacy level, 70.48 per cent of the fathers and 66.19 per cent of the mothers are literate.Though the parents are not members of any organisation, awareness of the importance of education is high and most attend the annual school function.

Parents cite a range of reasons for sending their children to the municipal school. Most reasons are linked to the convenience of having the school in the vicinity of the home and the fact that the school provides a number of incentives. "I studied in the same school till the third standard. I have put my daughter also in the same school because it is close to my house and I like the teachers there", says Paramashivan, whose daughter Bhuvaneshvari is in the second standard. "I cannot afford to send my daughter to a private school. This school also gives food to my daughter so it works out just fine for us", says Prabhakaran, who works as a shop assistant and who studied in the municipal school till the tenth standard. Amavasa studied in this school till the fifth standard. His daughter Parvati is in the second standard in the same school. He says, "I do not plan to send my daughter to high school. By the time she finishes her primary school she will be old enough to go with her mother to work." Jeeva and Meena have both studied in the municipal school and have enrolled their daughter in the same school. "We both studied here. So we'd like our daughter to study here too." Location and the absence of additional economic demands on them make it convenient for them to send their daughter to this school. However, a number of parents had opted to send only their daughters to the municipal school while

they were bearing the expenses of sending their sons to private schools. "Once my daughter gets married she will not go out and work. So why waste money on sending her to an English-medium school? It is my duty to educate her – I will be fulfilling my duty even if I send her to the corporation school," says Mani Maran, a building contractor whose daughter goes to the corporation school while the son attends a private school.

CLASSROOM TRANSACTIONS

Despite the relatively small size of the student body and an advantageous teacher-student ratio (1: 26 in 2000), and the fact that most of the standards had a classroom to themselves, the classes were not effective or interesting. Frequent teacher absenteeism made it necessary to combine classes, which led to the classes being chaotic. Lessons were not well planned and the standard chalk-and-talk method was used. The researcher noted the extent to which three of the five classes were particularly poorly managed, with the teachers not paying individual attention to the students. Most of the teaching transactions consisted of children copying questions and answers from the blackboard. Only two of the teachers frequently checked the children's books. Even here the errors made by the children were not corrected, though they were noted. More particularly, corporal punishment was frequent with little or no attempt made to cater to the students' requirements or interests. The headmaster justified corporal punishment saying, "These children do not respond to kindness. They have to be beaten to discipline them."

A Class in Session

It is after lunch and sixteen children slowly enter the fifth standard classroom. As the children continue to loiter around their desks, the master goes to the steel cupboard, muttering, "Only if they are treated as cows will they be obedient". He brings out a cane which is about two-inches thick and four feet long and in a wild rush beats the children across their backs. Though the six girls in the front row are seated and are arranging their books, they also receive a collective thrashing. One girl starts to cry. The master moves quickly from row to row cracking the cane on the children's backs. The boys in the last row grimace in pain and brave the second round of thrashing.

The master then moves to the blackboard and addressing us, the researchers, says, "Just as bullocks need to be whipped to make them pull the cart, so must these students be whipped to get them to start studying". Then in a rush, he asks, "How many seconds in a minute?" and even before the children can answer, he says, "Be as sharp and quick as light...doesn't a bulb come on as soon as a switch is put on? You must be quick to answer."

The children are still reeling from the beating and are unable to answer his question. The master then goes on to draw the face of a clock and to explain the hours and minutes of time.

Dropout or elimination rates

The dropout rate for the different classes was relatively low with an average of only 12-14 per cent dropping out in Standards I to V. However, attendance rates were low with as many as 30-35 per cent of the children not attending classes regularly. While the teachers blamed parents for the poor attendance, the children themselves did not consider school enjoyable to attend all the time. Many children did not attend the school after lunch, again leading to the teachers noting that such children were attending school only for the meal. Low academic achievement meant that only 30 per cent of the children went on to secondary school, while the majority were integrated into the informal economy or into various forms of employment in the service and industrial sectors.

In order to compare the functioning of this school with that of the two other types of schools, we chose to study an aided and a private school.

An Aided School

An aided school managed by a Hindu charitable trust presents a contrast to the functioning of the municipal school. Though the aided school was started in the late nineteenth century, it still retains its reputation for academic excellence. The students are from mixed caste and class backgrounds, though the trends indicate that more students from lower caste backgrounds are enrolling in the school. According to the records, the school was once composed primarily of Brahmin and upper-caste students but it now attracts children from

the lower castes, thus reflecting the changing composition of the town. While this was the only school in the area for many years, there are now, as in other wards of Tanjavur, a number of private schools, one of which is primarily for children of the Brahmin families.

In 2000, the primary school alone had a student strength of 994 students, with five sections for each standard. Sections A and B were for boys, C and D were for girls while E consisted of both girls and boys. With 18 teachers, the teacher-student ratio was 1:55 but despite this and the fact that the classrooms had no benches and all the children were crowded into the rooms and were seated on the floor, the classes were organised with a strong emphasis on teaching-learning transactions. As it is an aided school, the teachers receive government salaries but are accountable to the management. There is little or no teacher absenteeism and the focus of the school remains on providing academic support. While the classes are organised, there is little or no scope for innovative teaching or for more student-centred teaching-learning practices in the classroom. As the researcher observed, the classes were conducted with an emphasis on transmitting the contents of the textbooks to the children. Use of the board, chalk and repeating after the teacher were the main methods employed.

The children were from mixed socio-economic and caste backgrounds. While a large number of the students' parents were from working class backgrounds, a number of parents were from professional and white-collar backgrounds. Parents who had professional backgrounds had sought to place their children in this school either because they had studied in it or because they considered that with its Tamil-medium education and

good academic record, it was the best for their children. On the other hand, parents from working-class backgrounds admitted their children here either because it was in the vicinity of their homes or because they had heard that it was a school with a good academic record.

Although teachers did not visit the students' homes, the relationship between the school and the community was relatively better than in the municipal school. With a mixed student body, teachers were not dismissive of the children and were in fact sympathetic about the poor economic conditions of some of the students. Some parents who had been happy with the functioning of the school and their children's performance had donated items such as chairs, clocks, cupboards, etc. to the school.

A Private Primary School

In Ward 1 and only a few blocks away from the municipal school is a private school which caters to children whose parents are primarily from the lower- middle and middle-class backgrounds. Started in 1996 with 50 students, the school had, in 2001, 165 students in Classes LKG to Standard V. Functioning from the first floor of a rented building, the school consists of seven small rooms converted into classrooms and charges fees ranging from Rs 150 per month for LKG to Standard II to Rs 250 per month for Standards III to V. The owners, a couple in their mid-forties, are also the Principal and teachers of the school. The Principal cites his interest in education and his understanding of the reasons for the high rates of failure at the school level as his reasons for establishing the school. His wife, who also teaches in the school, adds

that the decision to start the school also stemmed from the fact that though she has completed her M.Ed. she was unable to get a government job for years and this was a way in which they could both be employed. The Principal teaches most of the subjects including English grammar, social science, environmental science, and mathematics.

Adding that he has "an instinct for teaching", and that his family background (his grandfather was a translator in the Tanjavur royal court) has given him a good knowledge of English, the Principal asserts the need for a new orientation to education. Identifying the problems in the education system, he says the drill method that is implemented in most schools does not explain concepts to children. "Children should understand what they are being taught. They cannot learn by rote." He says that most English-medium schools ignore the mother tongue. He feels that lessons should be taught in the mother tongue so that children are better able to grasp concepts. "In our school I teach everything in Tamil. Children understand what I say and then I explain the same things in English. This helps them remember what is taught."

The Principal also notes that he regularly conducts classes for the teachers. The school does not conduct monthly tests. Their exams mainly consist of objective-type questions, so memorising is minimised. The Principal says that children are pressurised to study throughout the year. The school calendar is designed such that the syllabus is always completed by the end of December, and the remaining months are spent on revision and extra-curricular activities.

The school has four teachers, of whom two have B. Ed. Degrees and the other two Master's degrees. They are paid a salary of Rs 500-900 per

month. The class teachers teach Tamil, moral instruction, social science, environmental science and general knowledge. There are separate teachers for Hindi and computer science. Special tuition is offered for "weak" students, that is students who are unable to perform well in the class tests. The school holds Parent Teacher Association meetings thrice a year and the meetings are attended by almost 75 per cent of the parents.

Classroom Transactions in the Private School

Classes are organised with teachers preparing for each class. Though this is supposedly an English-medium school, the subjects, including maths, are taught using both English and Tamil. Homework is assigned for each class and is regularly checked and corrected. Classes are regimented with an emphasis on transferring textbook knowledge and on preparing children for exams. As the school is situated in a narrow street with no playground, there are no outdoor games.

Growth of Private Schools

This private school is generally representative of the large number of new private schools that are emerging in the town. Since the 1990s, there has been a mushrooming of private schools and the demand for private schooling is so high that although there is a rule that no school should be opened within one kilometre of a recognized school, many private schools have been established within this distance.

Several reasons are cited for this demand for, and growth of, private schools. Some of the teachers in the school note that most children

and parents prefer English-medium schools and Tamil-medium aided schools because they run buses to pick up and drop the children, and because English and computers are given more importance than Tamil. Another teacher seconds this opinion and asserts, "Children are influenced by English ads on TV. So they prefer to study in English-medium schools". Parents note that the teaching in private and aided schools is better than the teaching in municipal schools.

Teachers at the private school had differing views on the corporation/ municipal school. While one teacher said the municipal schools lack discipline, another said the municipal school allowed children to "enjoy their childhood" because they do not burden children with homework. "Parents of children going to the municipal school do not take any interest in what their children do. There is no family involvement and so children do not study," says a teacher in the private primary school. Asked if she would send her own children to a municipal school she said, "No. I want my child to be disciplined and concentrate on studies. That does not happen in a municipal school." The teachers, however, agreed that since the teachers in municipal schools do not have to answer for drop in attendance, they do not take the trouble to see that more children enrol in their school. For the same reason there is no pressure on them to maintain good teaching standards.

Parents of children studying in the private school said they preferred this school to other schools as they were satisfied with the teaching here. Most of the parents interviewed had themselves studied in municipal schools but were keen that their children study in private schools because they considered the standard of teaching and the

administration to be better. Several parents also noted that they had chosen the private school as the medium of instruction here was English and children are taught to use computers. As one of the parents said, "Government schools are really undisciplined. Teachers do not teach well and children are not given any homework. So they do not study at home. Here, there is a lot of homework given. So once the children come home they are busy studying".

Ambition and associating education with job prospects are the primary reasons why most parents choose the private, English-medium school. "I want my daughter to grow up and join the railways. She should be economically independent," says Padmini, mother of Priyadarshini who studies in the fourth standard in the private school. "Without English and computers nothing works. I want my daughter to study well and master both English and computers and get a good job", says Ramamurthy, who is a science graduate.

In contrast to such views, parents who sent their children to the municipality school had different reasons and orientations for wanting to educate their children. Most of the working-class parents who send their children to the municipal school noted that they sent their children to school to become literate and to "lead lives better than ours". Most of them did not specify occupations or ambitions for their children. However, some of the parents who sent their children to the private school, expressed specific ambitions that they had for their children. Many wanted them to be white-collar workers or professionals. Yet, the cost of private schooling does not assure entry to all children. Parents were forced to assess such expenditure and make decisions, and

differentiate between their sons' and daughters' opportunity to be educated in the private school. Such cost and opportunity assessment strategies meant that some parents chose to send only their son or sons to private schools while daughters were sent to aided or municipal schools. At least 12 per cent of the girls in the municipal school had brothers who studied in private, English-medium schools.

In addition to the gender-based differences in education opportunity, such attitudes towards private schooling also have implications for the functioning of the municipal schools and the aided government schools. As middle- class and better-educated and professional parents withdraw their children from the government schools, the accountability of teachers and the pressure on them to teach or perform their other duties in school, decreases. As working-class parents, especially the labouring poor, cannot wield authority and exert pressure like the educated and professional parents, they and their children are seen as liabilities and dependent recipients who are unworthy of being educated. Further, such differentiation has other implications for the children's experience of schooling, the autonomy and rights of teachers, and the larger purpose of education.

Implications of Differentiated Schooling

Each of the three types of schools has an organisational structure of its own and its effectiveness depends largely on this structure. While the municipal school has facilities and the advantages of a low teacher-student ratio, teaching-learning transactions here are inadequate, the functioning of the school and its treatment of the children are dismal.

This can be linked to the fact that there is little or no direct accountability of the teachers to either the authorities or to the community. On the other hand, the aided school functions effectively within the narrow definition of providing schooling, as there is high accountability of the teachers to the management and the management in turn depends on the state to support the salaries of the teachers. Similarly, the private school functions effectively because its survival depends on satisfying the parents. In both the aided and the private schools, effective functioning is ensured thanks to regularity and transmission of formal knowledge and information, but the teachers do not enjoy any autonomy or opportunity to use child-centred or new teaching-learning methods.

Children's Assessment of the Schools

Most of the children from the private school observed that their daily routine consisted primarily of going to school, returning around 5.30 p.m. and then doing their homework. Children in the municipal school on the other hand, said they go home and play with their friends and help their parents – girls with the cooking while boys assist their fathers in their work. Very few of the children in the municipal school said they studied regularly at home or did homework.

While most children said they enjoyed school, a handful of children from the municipal school said that they did not like school because they were beaten there. It is thus evident that differentiated schooling makes for different schooling experiences. While private schooling has a regimented structure with little or no scope for children to play,

the municipal school provided little structure, was also punitive and did not enhance the children's knowledge base.

Class, Caste and Schooling

A significant reason for the growth of schools of different types is that schools cater to different class and caste groups and therefore make for differentiated education opportunities. The following two tables indicate the difference in composition between the three schools.

Table : I

SCHOOLS AND PARENTAL OCCUPATION VARIATIONS

MUNICIPAL SCHOOL	PRIVATE SCHOOL	AIDED SCHOOL
Woodcutter Peon	Pharmacist Coconut seller	Sweeper Technician
Milkman Poojari	Railway employee Tailor	Coolie Agricultural coolie
Businessman Farming Vegetable vendor	Sweetmeat store owner Cycle shop owner Lab technician	Vegetable vendor Petty shopkeeper Servant maid
Construction worker Beedi rolling	Bank secretary Principal of school	Construction worker Painter
Coolie Hotel owner	Fancy store owner Shoe shop owner	Driver Tailor
Agricultural labourer	Policeman Medical representative	Housewife Goldsmith Businessman
		Tender coconut seller Helper in a bakery
		Sales officer Photo studio owner Government employee

Table II
SCHOOLS AND CASTE DIFFERENCES

Percentage of Students

CASTE	MUNICIPAL SCHOOL	PRIVATE SCHOOL
SC	65	06
MBC	10	05
BC	19	67
OC	04	10
Religious minorities	_	12

Variations in the occupational background of parents are linked to their caste background. In the municipal school, 65 per cent of the children are from the Scheduled Castes, while 19 per cent are from the Backward Castes, 10 per cent are from the Most Backward Castes and 4 per cent are from the Other Castes and religious minorities. In contrast, most of the children (67 per cent) in the private school are from the Backward Castes (now an economically successful group in the town and its vicinity), 12 per cent belong to religious minorities, 10 per cent are from Other Castes, 6 per cent from Scheduled Castes, and 5 per cent from the Most Backward Castes. While caste details were not available from the Aided Government School, the presence here of children from different economic backgrounds indicates that no single caste category predominates in this school.

Given the variation in the background of the students and the functioning of the schools, it may be said that the municipal and private schools are a contrast to each other. One provides for Tamil-medium education with little or no individual attention given to the children, the other provides English-medium education with an emphasis on

the 'competitive edge' that children must have. In one, the children are treated as unnecessary burdens on the system, in the other the children are treated as carriers of their parents' ambitions. More specifically, the class and caste composition of the school ensures that the children here are not exposed to children with a different class and cultural background. In this, the schools fail to bridge the cultural and class divide which a common school could have ensured. In differently endowing children, the schools and their different educational systems help reproduce the inequities in the society. In sum, different schools provide for different sets of citizens without making it possible for education to act as a leveller, which would challenge and check the reproduction of inherited and social disadvantages.

This indicates the extent to which schools are increasingly getting segregated and differentiated on the bases of caste and class. The lack of support for government or municipal schools has led to the mushrooming of private, fee-paying schools. Such schools then act as enterprises with a narrow definition of education. This school differentiation, with different standards of education and orientations for different children, erodes the possibility of education being the shared experience on which citizenship and right to equal opportunities could be grounded. The decline of municipal schools testifies to the extent to which urban growth is increasingly being de-linked from a broader development orientation. As elected representatives seek to emphasise economic gains over the collective, long-term interests of the public, the school as a symbol and institution suffers. This is evident in the fact that issues of education are not central to the functioning and interests of the municipality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Reclaiming Municipal and/or Government Schools as Neighbourhood, or Common Schools

Tamil Nadu needs to build on its contribution to mass schooling and ensure that schools are established as common, public schools which can cater to all sections of the population. Rather than permitting a market-oriented approach to schooling, the state can encourage the revitalisation of all government schools. Such an approach will ensure not only an equitable access to schooling but also equitable education and thereby fulfil one of the main functions of mass education which is the bringing together of different sections of society and endowing them with equal capabilities and orientations.

II. Strengthening Decentralised School Administration Structures

There is an urgent need for decentralised structures, such as the wards and the education committees to be active in issues related to primary education. Although the corporation allocates a portion of its budget to education, there is not much interest in administering the schools. The corporation must activate its education unit, making sure that it includes members who will take an active interest in the town's education sector. Training for such structures should be imparted to all members and must include the dissemination of information regarding members' right to call for meetings (without waiting for the headmistress or headmaster to do so), to review records, to hold the teachers accountable, etc. Members should be trained to play their

roles effectively and not restrict themselves to organising school programmes on Independence Day and Republic Day. The right of members to inspect and maintain the infrastructure of the school, such as the classrooms, compound wall, toilets, drinking water, etc., should be highlighted. In addition, members need to be reoriented more strongly about the need for the entire community to contribute to the development of the school. Members should also be made aware of children's rights and of socio-economic and cultural practices within the community, such as child labour and child marriage, that may keep children out of school. In addition, members and teachers should be trained to lodge complaints and initiate follow-up on issues related to the supply of school items, such as textbooks, grains, and teaching aids. Such training should also provide them with examples of successful models adopted by other schools or areas for stemming the problem of dropouts and for devising practical and feasible solutions.

III. Reorienting Teacher Training

There is an urgent need to revise teacher training. Measures and programmes for making the school an attractive place need to focus on enabling teachers to be proactive agents in the education system. Teachers must be made conscious of the need to have a better understanding of the social and cultural backgrounds of parents and children. While teachers are insensitive to the culture and problems of non-literate parents, they seek to be tolerant and understanding of practices such as child marriage, untouchability, bonded labour, etc., which affect the educational opportunities of children. Both training and policies must seek to alter this contradictory attitude. The importance of being sensitive and tolerant towards the culture and

personality of parents must be integrated into the teacher training programmes. At the same time, training must emphasise the importance of not accepting as legitimate and excusable the cultural factors of early marriage, gender bias and parental neglect of schooling, and viewing them as personal factors which teachers cannot address.

A range of new pedagogies and orientation in teacher-student dynamics must be introduced. Ideas such as the superiority of the teacher and the lower position of students, the need to curb and control children, and corporal punishment are some of the issues which need to be addressed. The teacher recruitment policy can be altered to enhance accountability of teachers to the community and to ensure that communities receive teachers whom they can trust and respect.

IV. Improving Supervision and Review of Schools

The education department needs to play a more proactive and vigilant role. It must regularly inspect the infrastructure of schools, the attendance and activities of teachers, the maintenance of registers and records, and the general functioning of schools. In addition, the department must assess and guide all schools, government and private, on teaching-learning methods, use of new syllabi, treatment of children, and must encourage community-school interaction. School inspections must include suggestions for improvements which must be implemented within a fixed time-frame.

V. Children's Crisis Fund

Many children are withdrawn from school when a parent, especially the father, dies or when there is a crisis in the family. Assistance,

especially monetary and in kind, should be given to such children to ensure their continued attendance in school. A child-in-distress fund should be available to which all elected ward members, education committee members, and teachers can apply. Encouraging the public to donate to such a fund, and making this fund accountable to the donors, can help generate support and contributions.

VI. Block Awards for schools

One way to sustain standards and quality in schools is to initiate awards for schools at the ward/zonal levels. Schools can be evaluated for their functioning, attendance levels, maintenance of infrastructure, teachers' performance and children's achievement levels. News about these awards can be publicised and they can act as mechanisms for establishing quality and standards in schools.

VII. Comprehensive Data Collection

Although data collection at the town and district level is efficient, there is need to make the data more broad-based. For example, the district education office in Tanjavur collects and compiles a range of data related to all government-aided and government schools. However, no data is forthcoming on the number of private schools and other details related to them. Given the trend towards increasing complexity in the types of schools and the children who attend them, it is imperative that the state also collects data on private schools, including the number of teachers employed there and the student strength and background.

This report is based on field research conducted in Tanjavur, Tamilnadu and is part of a study conducted by NIAS in six different states in India. The conditions of schools and experiences of elementary education deprivation among the poor are highlighted in this report.

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ISBN 81-87663-34-0