

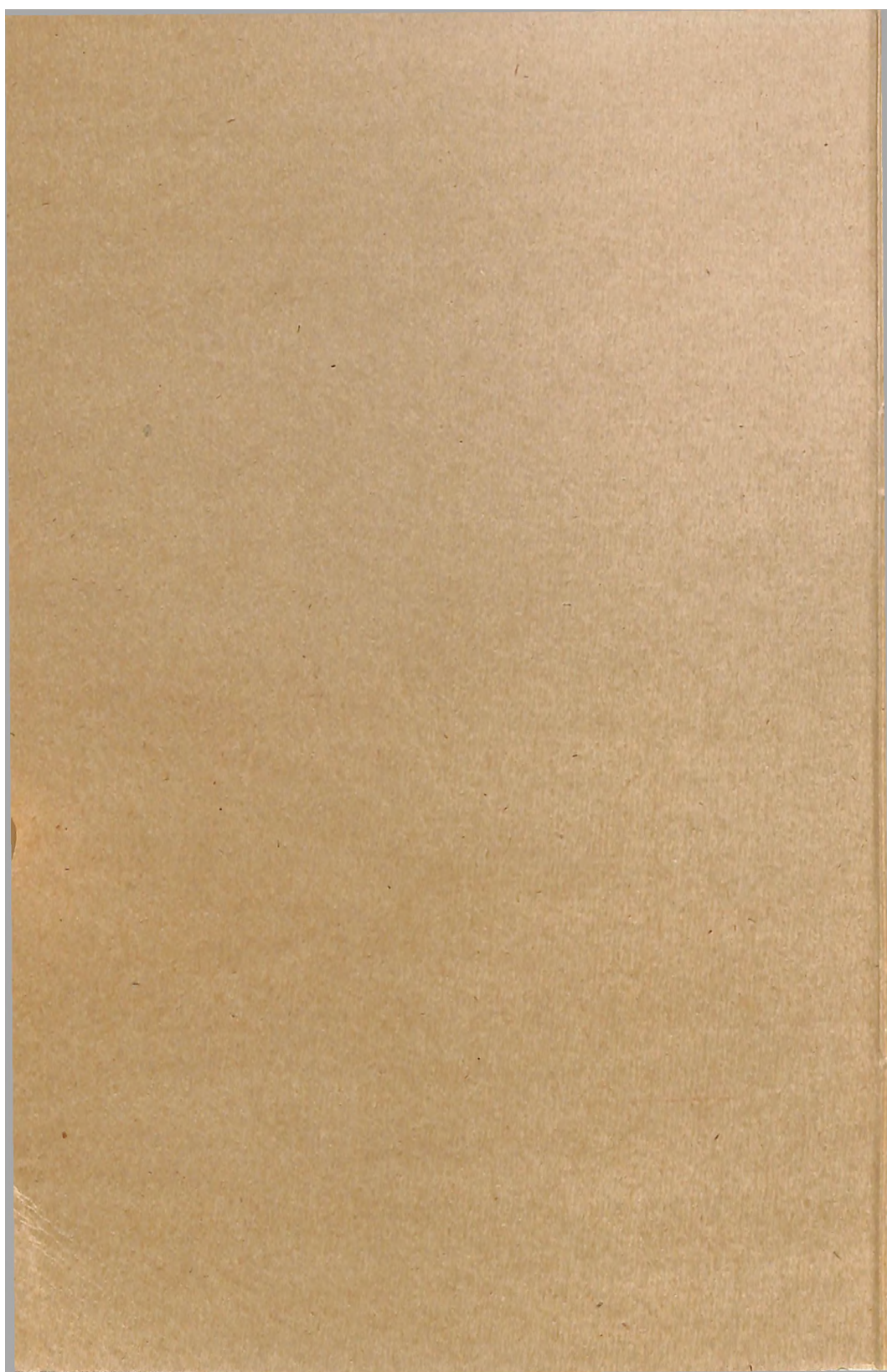
Jaunpur

Local Education Report

**NEW HOPE IN THE HILLS :
SCHOOLING AND THE DEMAND
FOR QUALITY EDUCATION**

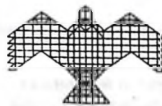


**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES
BANGALORE**



New Hope in the Hills
Schooling and the Demand
for Quality Education

Local Education Report
Jaunpur, Uttarakhand



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES

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The Controller
National Institute of Advanced Studies
Indian Institute of Science Campus
Bangalore 560 012
Phone : 080-3604351
Email : mgp@hamsadvani.serc.iisc.ernet.in

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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 elementary 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.

SIDH provided institutional support for conducting this study. Special thanks to Siya Singh Chauhan for his hard work and sincerity in

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conducting the field research. Anuradha Joshi and Pawan Gupta helped initiate the field study. Dr. Archana Mehendale and Sarita Tukaram helped compile and write this report, Savita Sastri processed the data, and Kala Sunder edited the reports. 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 valuable inputs.

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March 2002

A. R. Vasavi
NIAS, Bangalore

NEW HOPE IN THE HILLS: SCHOOLING AND THE DEMAND FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

Inaccessible terrain, scattered settlements, degraded ecology, unsustainable agriculture, migrant men and overburdened women. These have typically been identified as the disadvantages faced by people in Tehri Garhwal, a region in the lower Himalayas. Yet, there is now new hope in the hills, linked largely to the mass mobilisation for the formation of a separate state, which made people aware of their rights and the needs of the region. This hope is centred round the possibility of regenerating the local ecology, developing the communities and enhancing their economic opportunities. In this ambience of expectations and reorientation, the demand for better and relevant education for children is a dominant theme.

The demand for basic education was documented while conducting this study, which aimed to understand the state of elementary education and the prevailing trends in the region. Drawing on detailed

information¹ from three different villages in Jaunpur block (described below), this study attempts to identify the factors that have either promoted or hindered the development of primary schools and schooling in the region.

JAUNPUR BLOCK, TEHRI GARHWAL

Though widely known for their topographical beauty, the steep hills and scattered settlements of Tehri Garhwal have not witnessed much development. Despite the low population density and an economy that is based on intensive cultivation of the hillsides and animal husbandry, the region suffers from low agricultural productivity, fragmentation of landholdings, low level of industrial development, and a lack of local jobs. For decades, the economic conditions in the region have led to the migration of men to urban areas. As a result, the burden of agricultural tasks, animal husbandry and other economic responsibilities is shouldered primarily by women².

Such a gender-based work allocation is directly reflected in the high gender disparity in the district's literacy levels. In 1991, the male literacy rate was 72.09 per cent, while that for women was only 26.31 per cent³. This gender disparity of 46 per cent was one of the highest in the nation. However, the Census 2001 data indicates a bridging of

¹ The study is based on participant observation conducted primarily by Siya Singh Chauhan between August 1999 and April 2000. He interviewed parents, children, teachers and members of the community on issues related to education. He also observed classes and the functioning of schools in the three villages and noted the relations between the schools and the community.

² Bora, R.S. (1996) *Himalayan Migration: A Study of the Hill Regions of Uttar Pradesh*. New Delhi: Sage, and also McDougall, Lori (2000) 'Gender Gap in Literacy in Uttar Pradesh: Questions for Decentralised Educational Planning' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 35(19) pp 1649-1658

³ Census of India, 1991.

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the difference by 10 per cent; while male literacy is now 85.62 per cent, female literacy is 49.76 per cent⁴. Literacy levels for the district as a whole are characterised more by high gender disparity than by low levels of general literacy.

Tehri Garhwal has a predominantly upper-caste population. As per the 1991 census data, the region's proportion of upper-caste Hindus is 80 per cent compared to the national average of 13 per cent, while the proportion of SC population is 14.2 per cent and that of STs is a negligible 0.11 per cent. Jaunpur also has a similar caste composition: in 1991, 18.84 per cent of the population were SCs and 0.69 per cent were STs, while the rest were upper-caste Hindus.

VILLAGES STUDIED

Three villages in Jaunpur block, Barani and Krutika located off the main road, and Pushya⁵, located in a more inaccessible region, and three schools situated in these villages, were selected for detailed study.

Barani is a medium-sized village comprising 16 Rajput households and three Dom (drum-beaters, now classified as a Scheduled Caste) households with a total of 200 persons. The three SC households own little land (less than 10 nali⁶) and are predominantly employed as agricultural workers in the fields owned by the Rajputs. The Rajputs own an average of 60 nali per household and are also engaged in

⁴ Census of India, 2001.

⁵ All three are pseudonyms for the three villages. This is to retain the identity and privacy of the persons who were interviewed and whose views are represented in this report.

⁶ 50 'nali' is equal to 1 hectare.

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various economic activities such as sale of goods. They also hold government jobs. The children of Barani go to the Government School which is in the village or to the NGO school in Krutika (2 km from the village) or to Shishu Mandir at Kempty (5 km from the village), also run by an NGO.

Krutika is a small village with only seven families, of which five are Doms (leather workers, identified as a Scheduled Caste), while the rest belong to the Rajput caste. The total population of the village is 78, of which 57 are SCs and 21 are Rajput. The main occupation of the residents is agriculture, and animal husbandry, though a few households own and manage retail shops for household goods in the village. The SCs own not more than 60 'nali' of land while Rajputs own more than 200 'nali'. Less than half the village (42 per cent) is literate. Children from Krutika attend either the school run by an NGO or the Government School at Barani⁷. Those who continue their education go to the Government College at Kempty.

Pushya is a hamlet with only seven households consisting primarily of Doms (leather workers, identified as a Scheduled Caste). The community has migrated from the neighbouring Himachal Pradesh and has lived in this village for the past seven decades. The main occupation of the community is agriculture and animal husbandry. As the landholdings are small, the agricultural produce can support the families only for six months of the year. Therefore, they undertake leather work for which they are paid in cash or kind (mostly grains).

⁷ Before 1990, when the NGO school did not exist, children from Krutika went to the Barani Government School which is two kilometres away.

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The women look after their own land and animals, while the menfolk work as agricultural labourers. Since the community has migrated from Himachal Pradesh, the people speak Himachali and celebrate festivals that are different from those of the region. In 2000, out of a total population of 42 in Pushya, only 24 (57 per cent) were literate.

The composite socio-economic profile of the three villages is as follows:

Education of the parents: Among the fathers, a little over half (51.61 per cent) were literate, 25 per cent were non-literate and about 23 per cent could only sign their names. About 39 per cent of mothers were literate while a little more than half (51.61 per cent) were non-literate. About 10 per cent of the mothers could only sign their names.

Family structure: Most of the families studied were joint families (67.74 per cent). The rest were nuclear families. Among the 62 households that were interviewed, there were only three extended families^{*}. The families had an average of 11.7 members each.

Caste structure and relations: Twenty-nine per cent of the families studied belonged to the Scheduled Castes, viz. Bajgi, Dom, and Kolta groups, while more than half (58 per cent) belonged to the upper castes, mainly Rajput, while a handful were Brahmins. Though inter-caste tensions were not reported, untouchability is practised in the villages. The people from the SC community cannot enter the houses of the Rajputs, since they are considered to be 'untouchables'. There were no households based on inter-caste marriages.

^{*} Households consisting of members from different families, e.g. relatives staying in these households for extended periods of time.

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Occupation: A majority (66 per cent) of the fathers were employed in agriculture and about 22 per cent worked as agricultural labourers. While most upper-caste persons own land, many of the SC households are dependent on wages earned as agricultural labourers. In return for agricultural work, the Rajputs offer them food and/or grains, though monetary payments are supplanting such transactions. Among the mothers, a majority (82 per cent) worked on their own agricultural land. The remaining households were involved in construction work, petty businesses, semi-skilled work and service of the clerical or menial kind.

Organisational membership: A majority of parents were not members of any local organisation. A few men (8 out of 62) were involved in Panchayats and a few women (7 out of 62) were involved in the Mahila Sangha. Three women were also involved in the Panchayats.

Migration: Men between the ages of 15 and 25 years, primarily Rajputs, who have studied up to the secondary level, have migrated to Dehradun, Delhi, Mussoorie, Himachal Pradesh, and Chandigarh. Currently, there is a decrease in the levels of migration, as many men seek to be employed in the vicinity itself.

The findings of the study comprising interviews and observations over a period of eight months, are outlined below.

MOBILISATION FOR EDUCATION AND INSTITUTION BUILDING

In general, the residents of the three villages place a high premium on education for their children. Parents in all the three villages studied consider illiteracy to be a disadvantage. As many of the people note,

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“Educated persons can use technology in agriculture”, “Education can help us use new techniques to increase [agricultural] production, and sell grains outside, and lead better lives”. Though the primary purpose of education is perceived to be employment, it is also considered important for “doing accounts and calculations”, “in order to gain social reputation”, and as a necessity in order to “save ourselves from being cheated”. They also consider that inability to understand English (which they note is widely used) places adults at a disadvantage.

There is also social pressure to send children to school. In some cases, children are sent to school to avoid social ridicule. As a boy in Std. II said, *‘anpadh ko koi ladki bhi pasand nahi karti’* (no girl approves of an illiterate groom). Thus, schooling for children has become a norm in these communities. Children from Krutika described illiterates as ‘dullards’, ‘those who cannot speak Hindi fluently’ and as ‘dirty’. Citing a wide range of advantages that can accrue from education, both adults and children noted that “those who are educated can do jobs”, “nobody can cheat them”, and felt that “educated people can become rich while the uneducated remain as labourers”.

School education receives high priority in these communities, as evidenced by the following statement: “It is alright if the roads are bad, if there is no telephone or even electricity, but the schools and education should be good”. The presence of NGOs and their work in the fields of health and education have raised the awareness of village residents. Further, the employment opportunities in government departments and services, greater communication and interaction with outsiders, and the establishment of schools in the villages have all combined to enhance the desire for education.

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The establishment of schools within walking distance has also contributed to enhancing the enrolment of children. For a majority of children (93.55 per cent), the distance to school was less than a kilometre. Only a small number of children walked a distance of 3-5 km to school. Almost all children walked to school. Although half the total number of children (43.55 per cent) reached school within five minutes, there were seven children who took more than half an hour to reach their respective schools.

That schooling has become acceptable in recent years is seen in the fact that a significant proportion (98 per cent) of children between 6 and 11 years of age in the three villages were enrolled and attending school. In contrast, many children in the 12-16 age group had either dropped out of elementary school itself or had never been enrolled.

CONDITIONS IN SCHOOLS AND TRENDS IN SCHOOLING

Although most children between the ages of 6 and 11 years are in school, the functioning of the schools is not satisfactory. Both the government schools are marked by high teacher and student absenteeism. A majority of the children (59.68 per cent) attended school only for 2-3 weeks a month and about 16.13 per cent attended school for only 1-2 weeks every month. A majority of the children (77.42 per cent) said that they came to school on time.

Though the school in Barani was established in 1965 and has grown to include a middle school, it still consists of only two classrooms that have to house Stds. I - V. Three women teachers have been deputed

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to the school. The total number of children in the Barani school has decreased from 42 in 1995 to 34 in 1999. This could be a result of demographic transition given the decrease in fertility levels and the size of families. Although the overall proportion of girls in Barani school is higher, our research shows that girls tend to slowly drop out in each class. Of the 10 girls who enrolled in 1995, only two were still in school in 1999. However, at the middle school level, the data showed that no girls dropped out between 1998 and 1999. The total number of days that the school functioned in Barani also decreased between 1995 and 1998. While the school functioned for 242 days in 1995, it functioned for 237 days in 1996, 209 days in 1997, and 218 days in 1998.

The school in Pushya, consisting primarily of children from SC families, was the most dysfunctional. Not only was it closed for long periods of time, the frequent absence of the teachers has also made the students turn truant. On any given day, a large proportion of the children (30 - 40 per cent) were absent from school. Parents spoke of a range of problems with the school. It did not function properly and little or no teaching was done. As a result, the total number of children was lowest in the last four years (1995-1999), viz. 30 students. During 1995-1999, the proportion of girls in the school was much lower compared to boys. Most of the children are withdrawn from school when they complete Std. V.

The functioning of an NGO school in Krutika is in sharp contrast to the two government schools. Though the idea of establishing a school was initiated by an NGO, it was established through contributions from

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residents of the village and with their active support. The land for the NGO school was donated by the village and the village residents also contributed their labour for building the school. It has three rooms which accommodate KG to Std. V. There are four teachers (two men and two women), most of whom are residents of nearby villages. Only one teacher is a graduate with a degree in education, while the rest have studied up to the intermediate level. In 1999, there were 58 students enrolled in the school. A majority of them were non-SCs. Among the SC children, a majority are girls while in the non-SC category, boys and girls are almost equal in number.

Since the government schools in the vicinity are dysfunctional, parents have been sending children to the NGO school though they are expected to pay an annual school fee⁹. The school does not have toilets or a library though there are plans to build these.

THE STATE AND SCHOOLS

The most disturbing issue that emerged from the study of the three villages was the abysmal failure of the State in regulating the functioning of schools. More specifically, the State has not made any serious effort to retain children in school and ensure that they are able to achieve the desired levels of learning at the end of their schooling.

Even the basic incentive schemes of the State are administered poorly. For example, no teaching-learning material has been provided to any

⁹ The annual school fees are as follows: Rs. 75 for LKG, Rs. 90 for KG, Rs. 100 for Std. I, Rs. 120 for Std. II, Rs. 135 for Std. III, Rs. 150 for Std. IV and Rs. 160 for Std. V.

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of the schools for the past six years. The schools do not have adequate classrooms, play equipment, or toilet facilities. Even the special schemes are poorly administered. For example, under the grain distribution programme (wherein children get 3 kg of rice per month), foodgrains are allocated irregularly and sometimes are not available for 6-7 months. In 1999, grains were distributed for only 3-4 months. Parents also complain about the poor quality of the grains. Similarly, textbooks which are supposed to be supplied free to the children are not distributed on time and the supply stopped abruptly in 1998. Supply of books is irregular and no full set of books has been received. The children are not given regular medical check-ups in school. This is a matter of concern since the study found that a very high proportion (41.92 per cent) of the children suffered from a variety of ailments.

Freeships, which are available to children from SC and backward classes, are very often not enough to cover all needy children, and therefore the most needy children have to be selected by the teachers, using their discretion. According to the teachers, the mid-day meal programme had a positive impact on attendance but that too has stopped since 1999.

The SC/ST children receive scholarships of Rs. 100-150 upto Std. V in addition to exemption from paying fees. But the scholarship does not cover all the children who are in need of financial assistance. The teachers collect 10 paise per child and use it towards the contribution of those who cannot afford to contribute to the common school fund which is used to purchase chalk and other teaching aids. Some teachers indicated that incentives given by the government to certain categories of children create a sense of discrimination among students.

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Contrary to the government's claim of 'free education' being offered to all children, families do incur expenses on schooling (other than the opportunity costs). Of the 62 children interviewed, 40 (57 per cent) paid annual fees ranging between Rs. 21 and Rs. 25, and 18 children said that they incurred an expenditure of Rs. 50 per year by way of school fees. Most of the children also incurred other expenditure towards their education. While 32 per cent spent less than Rs. 100, a majority of the children (59.68 per cent) spent Rs. 100 – 500, while three children spent Rs. 500 –1000 on their education. These were expenses towards buying bags, books, pens, and other stationery.

An important reason for the absence of State regulation and administration of elementary schools is that there is only one inspector for all the schools in the block. As a result, inspection of schools is irregular and inadequate. As many of the teachers and parents observed, inspection of schools is rare and support to the teachers is limited.

COMMUNITY-SCHOOL RELATIONS

Though the demand for basic education is high, the actual contribution of the community to the school is limited and uneven. In some cases, as in Krutika, people are willing to contribute towards the education of their children. A mother's observation, '*school to hamara hai, hamare bacchon ka bhavishya hi to sudhar raha hai*' (The school is ours, it is our own children's future which is being improved'), illustrates the positive attitude towards schools.

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But there are caste-based variations in the ability of individuals to take an interest in the functioning of schools. Unlike upper-caste parents who are more vocal and assertive about schools and the conditions there, members of the SC community are diffident about voicing their criticism against the schooling system. Parents from the low-ranked castes are hesitant to visit the schools or meet the teachers.

Many parents are also reluctant to engage with the school. Almost half the fathers (48.39 per cent), mainly the fathers of boys, rather than girls, have visited their children's schools. None of the mothers (except the mother of one boy) have visited the schools. Similarly, a majority (82.26 per cent) of the fathers had attended parent-teacher meetings while none of the mothers have done so. This difference in the involvement of fathers and mothers does not indicate women's or mothers' lack of interest in education. Rather, it highlights the gender-based allocation of interests and activities and is a direct reflection of the long history of education deprivation among women. Despite the fact that mothers do not visit the school often, they were vocal about the conditions in the schools and the need for their children to be educated.

PANCHAYATS AND SCHOOLS

With the new emphasis on decentralisation of education management, the Panchayats are expected to play an important role in ensuring the effective functioning of schools. Yet, the lack of intensive and periodic training for these elected representatives and community members

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has meant that the right to decentralised management of schools is not exercised.

As many of the residents noted, the Panchayats are not interested in education, for it is an issue that is often marginalised, with much of the attention being given to concerns such as construction of roads and water supply. In addition, some parents noted that Panchayats are often headed by illiterate persons and are therefore ineffective in addressing school-related issues. In some cases, as in Krutika, the Panchayat has contributed by providing land, labour and materials. But in the other two villages, the Panchayat does not assist the school except during festivals, when it distributes sweets to the children.

An issue that seems to be contentious is the accountability of teachers to the community. Although there are complaints about high teacher absenteeism in government schools and the dysfunctional character of these schools, the Panchayats seldom exercise their authority and initiate action. However there are stray cases of intervention by a Panchayat member, as in the case of a Panch in Pushya who registered a complaint about a truant teacher. The Panchayat as a body and the community as a whole are unable to ensure that the schools are run effectively.

Many residents of the villages felt that the inability of Panchayats to be effective in education issues was linked to their inability to function as fully autonomous bodies. As the Panchayat members themselves note, decentralisation is not a reality and the system is still bureaucratic. While the Panchayat structure exists and people are elected to Panchayats, they have no control over the school and its functioning.

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Parents considered it possible for the community to oversee the functioning of the school only if the right of the Panchayats to regulate the functioning of schools is accepted, and there is more effective and regular official support for the community's involvement.

In addition to the Panchayat, there is the Gram Shiksha Samiti, which is supposed to meet every month. But it has been dysfunctional in all three villages. As many residents pointed out, they are rarely informed about the activities of the Gram Shiksha Samiti. Many did not know that the Parent-Teacher Meetings are distinct from the meetings of the Gram Shiksha Samiti.

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY CALENDAR

A key issue in the administration of schools is the lack of fit between the school calendar and the community's schedule of work and festivals. The typical school calendar starts in June, and this coincides with the community's work schedule when even young children are required to help out. Thus, the peak agricultural seasons are also times when there is high student absenteeism. For example, during the period after the monsoons, children are required to help in transplanting saplings, and with harvesting, especially of ginger, corn and wheat. Yet, the school calendar does not allow for such integration of children into the local calendar and therefore creates tensions for the parents and children and discord with the teachers over student absenteeism. Absenteeism is higher among children of Scheduled Caste families and among children from nuclear families, who are drawn into the agricultural work especially during harvesting and sowing.

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Children were also found to be absent from school during certain community festivals which are ignored in the school calendar. For example, in Jaunpur, *Sankrant* is celebrated every month, and on these days, there is unofficial closure of schools or high absenteeism among both teachers and students. On the other hand, festivals like *Shivratri*, *Janmashtami*, *Raksha Bandhan*, *Holi* (which are celebrated in other parts of the country) are not celebrated in Jaunpur, but the school is officially closed on these days. Thus, the number of school days is reduced owing to a mismatch between local needs and bureaucratically determined policies.

TEACHERS: PROBLEMS, ATTITUDES AND RELATIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY

As key players in the education system, teachers, their problems, attitudes, and relations with the community, are central to the functioning of schools. Most of the government school teachers do not belong to the villages or to the area to which they are assigned to teach. Many teachers live in the towns with their families, and their children attend either private schools or high schools. Even teachers who live in the villages often commute to the towns for weekends and holidays. As many parents indicate, and as observed by the researcher, teachers tend to stretch their holidays and are frequently absent from the village. As a result, teacher absenteeism is high and this is the reason why parents feel they lack a sense of responsibility.

Yet, life in the villages is not easy for the teachers. Those who did live in the villages where they were teaching, noted several problems, such

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as lack of adequate housing and water. Although they acknowledge the helpful nature of the community, they do not wish to stay in the village and hope to get transferred to some 'better' place. In the NGO school, although the teachers belong to other villages, their appointment is conditional on their residing in the vicinity of the school, and this accounts for the more regular presence of teachers in this school.

Training: Most of the teachers in the government schools that were studied have completed their intermediate exams and undergone the Basic Teachers' Course (BTC). They have been appointed by the government. Job selection or recruitment is done serially on the basis of an exam. After the BTC, teachers undergo only two training courses. This recruitment procedure has led to several problems. For instance, teachers are not trained in multi-grade teaching although all of them are assigned multi-grade teaching in government schools. As a result, they are unable to deal effectively with multiple classes. The disorganised classes and low achievement levels of children can be attributed to this deficiency in teacher training.

The situation in the NGO school, on the other hand, shows that adequate and relevant training of teachers can help address or prevent such problems. Of the four teachers in the NGO school, only one is a graduate with an additional degree in education, while the other three have completed only the intermediate level of education. Yet, the fact that their training was focused on making them more child-centred and accessible to the children and their parents, has earned them the reputation of being more reliable and responsible.

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Many of the teachers in the government schools consider the present basic education curriculum to be irrelevant to real life. They indicate the absence of vocational training or training in skills and the failure to incorporate local knowledge as the reasons why parents do not find education attractive. The teachers pointed out the need for external examinations to objectively assess children's performance. They also expressed the need for the government to recognise their work.

While a majority of teachers are members of the *Prathamik Shiksha Sangha* (a state-wide Teacher's Union), a strong body taking up teachers' administrative grievances, none of them are members of teachers' associations that focus on improving their skills and attitude towards teaching. None of the teachers were members of groups that discussed or shared ideas about pedagogy or the development of new teaching aids.

Although the relationship between teachers and the education department appears to be a positive one, and the teachers consider the administrators to be supportive, there is a range of inputs that the teachers would like to have from the administration. The teachers are also upset that the government is indifferent towards its schools. Although the schools require repairs, furniture and planks to sit on, blackboards and other teaching-learning materials, these are not provided for by the government. Citing the need for more administrative inputs, teachers would like the State to provide books and uniforms in adequate numbers, as also freeships and mid-day meals. They consider this a way of enabling economically vulnerable parents to send their children to school and as a way of ensuring better functioning of schools. In noting such inputs as key to the functioning

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of schools, teachers fail to focus on and acknowledge the importance of their own inputs. This failure to reflect on their own roles and contribution is compounded by their negative attitude towards the children's parents and their culture.

Teachers' relations with children and parents

Since most teachers do not share the same socio-economic and cultural background as the village residents and school children, there is a certain distance and even hostility between them. Unable to understand the culture, problems and life-conditions of working and poor parents, many teachers hold them responsible for the children's low educational achievement. The fathers are considered to be more guilty, since most of them are literate and yet take no interest in their children's studies. In the two government schools, teachers blamed parents for poor/low involvement in their children's education. They also blamed large families for the dismal academic performance and condition of the schools. The lack of parental motivation and interest in children's day-to-day schooling needs, and poor attendance at parent-teacher meetings were also complaints voiced by teachers.

Teachers have little understanding of the attitudes, problems and daily struggle of parents. Sometimes, they harbour deep-rooted prejudices against the village people. According to a teacher, "People from the hills are dim-witted and there is liquor in their blood." Further, teachers commonly held the view that "unlike the people from the plains, both men and women from the hills drink alcohol and do not look after their children". "Hill people are backward. They have blind beliefs and use magic to solve their problems of illness."

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Another complaint is that parents send even young children to school, which creates a problem while teaching other children. Further, they consider parents to be negligent in their duties of supporting their children and their schooling. Teachers cited parents' disinterest in the health and hygiene of their children, the lack of supervision of the children's homework, failure to pay fees regularly although they could well afford to, and the use of children in various activities, which keeps them away from school. According to the teachers, the parents place the entire onus of the children's welfare on them (the teachers). But it is the parents' failure to provide children with a conducive environment at home that leads to children becoming 'dullards' and 'uneducable'. Teachers also consider parents to be poor role models since "they fight in the presence of their children and chew tobacco". According to a teacher, '*mata-pita bacchoan ke saamne kisi bhi cheez ka parda nahi rakhte*' (the parents do not hide anything from their children). The parents rarely enquire about the performance of their children in school.

Although a majority (75.81 per cent) of teachers have visited children's homes, there appears to be a lack of rapport between the teachers on the one hand, and the children and parents on the other. The inability of teachers to bridge the differences and the assessment by parents that schools are declining in quality and performance has made them critical of and hostile to the teachers.

CLASSROOM TRANSACTIONS

In order to understand the functioning of the school, pedagogical transactions, teacher-pupil relations and other dynamics within the classroom, the researcher observed different classes in the two selected government schools over a period of time, to see why parents and children have so many grievances against the government schooling system. Based on these observations, the following are the characteristics of the classes and of what can be termed as teaching-learning transactions:

1. Since most classrooms are combined or multi-grade classes, the classes that are not being taught are often in complete disarray. Children are distracted, talk and fight among themselves and are not engaged in any interesting activity.
2. Most teachers are unable to handle multi-grade classes and each class is taught in short durations of only 20-25 minutes each.
3. Teachers often resort to corporal punishment. Failure to write in the expected style, to respond with right answers, children fighting among themselves – all attract punishment.
4. Children are often expected to work on their own while the teacher takes another class. "Read lesson number.... chapter ... from the book, take down notes, or copy a drawing" are often the instructions that children receive.
5. It is not unusual for teachers to call students "dullards" (*Buddhu*), and to mock and ridicule them.
6. Children are expected to sit in segregated spaces with girls and boys occupying different rows and the SC children seated separately.

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7. Teachers spend considerable amounts of time talking among themselves and leave the children unattended.
8. Teachers are unable to relate to the children and draw their attention to issues and ideas.

Half A Day In A Government School

It is 9:45 in the morning and the children are playing in the school ground. Only one of the two teachers arrives in school and on seeing him the children stop their games and rush to sit down in the open space near the school building. All the children, irrespective of the class they are in, sit together. Without an assembly or prayers, the children get ready with their books and/or slates. The teacher asks them to be quiet and takes the attendance. He then asks the children to read their books, while he reads his own. After a while, the children grow distracted and start to talk and play with each other. Children from Stds. I and II throw tiny pebbles at each other. A little later, the teacher asks them to write an essay from their books. Only some of the children show their work to the teacher. He does not summon the others or check what they have done. At 12, it is time for lunch and the children who live close by go home to eat. The others eat on the school verandah and then start to play.

PARENTS' ASSESSMENT OF TEACHERS AND SCHOOLING

Many parents expressed a lack of confidence in the government teachers' ability to teach. As a parent in Pushya put it, '*aaj teachers 'teachers' kahne ke layak hi nahi hai, shikshakon ke andar shiksha dene ki bhavana hai hi nahi*' (The teachers of today are not worth the name, they do not have the aptitude to teach). Some parents cited the case of a teacher who did not know when to celebrate '26th January'. The parents were unhappy that the teachers did not teach the children about their immediate environment since this is not included in the curriculum. Nor did the teachers consider such knowledge to be important. Several parents worried that the learning ability of their children was severely hampered. The inability of children to read well, to write and speak English, to recite the multiplication tables of two even in Std. V, were cited as evidence of the lack of teaching in the government schools. One parent, who was sending his children to school despite poverty, resented the fact that they had not been taught anything in school.

Parents held teachers responsible for the dismal conditions in government schools. They cited a range of factors to support this view:

- Teachers are often absent from school and therefore there is little or no teaching.
- Teachers are unaccountable to the community and the government too does not supervise them.
- Some teachers mind their own children in the school.
- They do not speak the local dialect, Jaunpuri, and do not interact closely with the village residents.
- Their own children do not study in the same schools.

The 'Problem' of Women Teachers

The State government's policy of recruiting a large number of women teachers with the purpose of addressing the exclusion of girls from school has had mixed results in the region. While the presence of women teachers may have encouraged more families to send their daughters to school, many members of the community are biased against women teachers. This is evident in the fact that women teachers are called 'ladies' while male teachers are referred to as 'teachers'. Community members perceive women teachers as a problem since they are frequently absent, do not live in the villages, and do not teach well. According to a father, women teachers are not interested in teaching and come to school only to earn a salary. According to several adults, women teachers do their personal work, such as knitting, during school hours. One parent, who was upset that his child was unable to read and write despite attending school for three years, said that the school in Pushya had been 'ruined' by the 'ladies' since they are always on leave.

In addition to criticising the functioning of schools, many of the parents voiced the need for the school curriculum to include local knowledge and issues central to their community and society. As one parent, Shri Bhim Singh of Pushya village pointed out, it was important for the children of the community to learn the dialect and know more about the agriculture, ecology, festivals and culture of the region. Such an education, many stress, will enable children to engage with the community and lead adequate lives in their own region. Such views on the quality of education and the stress on local knowledge, stem not only from the ideas disseminated during the movement for a new

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State, but also from the growing sentiment that an appropriate type of education will help people lead sustainable lives here in their own place, without having to resort to migration.

The experience of the NGO school shows that recruiting local teachers, and establishing links with the local community helps to establish viable, functioning and satisfactory schools. In contrast to the widespread criticism against the government schools and teachers, the parents in Krutika were not only appreciative of the NGO school teachers and their efforts, but were also pleased with the integration of local knowledge into the curriculum. Children in this school not only had projects to identify the different plants and trees in the area, but were also encouraged to talk about different kinds of work and knowledge related to agriculture, animal husbandry, and the various festivals of the region. Such an orientation reassured parents that education need not be an alienating experience.

GIRL CHILDREN: WORK AND EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY

In addition to the school-related factors that account for dysfunctional schools, low achievement levels and community dissatisfaction with schools and education, there are community-related factors that account for some of the problems in achieving better and more equitable basic education. For one, girls are considered to be '*paraya dhan*' (someone else's property) and therefore parents are reluctant to invest in their education. Until recently, such a perspective accounted for the fact that the priority of parents was to have their daughters married without any basic education.

In addition to such cultural biases, the economic structure and conditions of the region have burdened girls and women with work. They are considered to be better than boys and men in agricultural work. Studies show that in the lower Himalayan region, the tasks of fodder and water collection are assigned primarily to unmarried girls¹⁰. Fodder collection is time-consuming and can be dangerous, as one has to climb over steep slopes to fetch grass. Our study also indicates that although children are absent frequently because they have to help with the domestic chores, girls have to face more hardships than boys. Many girls have to help during sowing, guard the crops against birds, and assist adults during the harvest.

However, the trend is changing and many girls are being sent to school. While a very high proportion of girls over 20 had either never been enrolled or had dropped out after a few years of schooling, most girls between the ages of 6 and 14 were currently enrolled and attending school. As one parent, Bachan Singh of Krutika, put it, '*ab ladka ladki dono ko samaan samajhkar padhaya ja raha hai*' (Nowadays, girls and boys are considered to be equal and are being educated).

SCHOOLING AND WORK

Combining school and work is a reality for most of the children, especially those from poor households and nuclear families. A high proportion of children from the three villages were found to be performing a range of different activities outside their school hours.

¹⁰ Chopra, R and D. Ghosh (2000), "Work Patterns of Rural Women in Central Himalayas", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 35 (52 and 53).

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More than half the children interviewed (58.06 per cent) undertook production activity within the household and on an average spent at least two hours everyday on household-related work. This included drying and peeling maize, harvesting and cleaning ginger, pounding and cleaning corn, clearing the fields, shelling green peas, etc.

Children, especially those belonging to small families, also perform a number of domestic chores such as caring for younger siblings, grazing cattle, collecting water, fuel and *gobar*. A couple of children were involved in processing grains and buying rations/shopping. There were gender differences in the kind of work performed. Cooking and washing clothes were done exclusively by girls (although one boy had to cook at home). More boys than girls were involved in grazing cattle. Surprisingly, caring for younger siblings was shared equally by both boys and girls. Such a work load is one of the reasons why several children are frequently absent or late to school. It is in such contexts that teachers hold parents responsible for their children's high absenteeism.

CONCLUSIONS

The demand for better and relevant elementary education by Jaunpur's residents comes in the context of their new hopes for regaining their economic, social and political autonomy and for bettering their life conditions. With a high propensity for education, they have even challenged biases against girl children and are now collectively asserting the need for a more relevant elementary education system. Although formal education is a recent phenomenon in the region, the articulation

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of these views indicates the extent to which people are not only able to identify functional and dysfunctional schools but also have certain expectations of what schools and therefore education should deliver. As a parent from Pushya noted, "Children are neither fit to work at home nor are they equipped to work outside. Our children have been ruined by these schools." Many people in the villages studied support the view that the schools are inadequate and have failed in their primary function. This is not a simplistic assessment. On the other hand, parents are stressing the importance of socially relevant education.

Going beyond demanding only adequate infrastructure for the schools, several parents spoke of the need for school education to enable their children to be fit for both local work and for external employment. Although education is expected to enable people to improve their social and economic status, parents would also like their children to learn the values of respecting and caring for elders and members of the community. That the community is able to make the children combine education and work is indicated by the fact that a large proportion of children who are in school are also assisting their parents in the domestic economy.

The fact that enrolment of children in the schools is high despite all these problems indicates that education is valued and in demand in the community. It is now for the State and the education administration, especially the teachers, to build on this demand and orientation for education. And providing elementary education should include the integration of people's knowledge so that education can mean not the ability to be away from the community but to engage with and contribute to the community and society at large.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Enhancing the State's Role in Primary Education

In order to establish schools as central institutions in a community or society and ensure their stable and effective functioning, it is important to integrate the efforts of the State, society and teachers. No longer can schools and schooling be considered the sole responsibility of either the State or society. A negotiated approach towards mass primary education must include both. Not only must the State allocate more funds for schools, it must also pay more attention to the administration of schools. It is imperative for the State to view education, especially elementary education, as the foundation for more broad-based and durable development. It is important for the State to continue to be a key player in the primary education sector and not consider the market as a viable alternative provider of mass elementary education.

II. Strengthening the Decentralised School Administration Structures

There is an urgent need for decentralised structures, such as the Panchayats and the Gram Shiksha Samitis, to be active in issues related to primary education. Training for such structures should be imparted to all members and must include the dissemination of information regarding their right to call for meetings (and not wait 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

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programmes on Independence Day and Republic Day. The right of members to inspect and maintain the infrastructure of the school, such as the classroom, 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. School-community calendar

Since the ecological, agricultural, work, and ritual activities of the communities often clash with the school schedule, there is the need to allow for a region-specific school schedule that will fit in with the community's schedule of activities. Children should be allowed to participate in the activities and work of the community and such activities should be seen as enabling the retention of local knowledge forms and identities. To develop such community-specific school calendars, flexibility can be devolved to the block level and block- or district-specific school calendars can be drawn up with the minimum and maximum number of school days specified. Such a community-based schedule will not only prevent high student absenteeism but

will also help bridge the gulf between school and community knowledge and work.

IV. Reorienting Teacher Training

There is an urgent need to revise teacher training and recruitment policies. 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 standing of students, the need to curb and control children, and corporal punishment are some of the issues which need to be addressed. The 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. Some

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of the local people suggested that the education department could send teachers on probation to communities for a period of a year. The probationary teacher's appointment to the community school would be validated and regularised at the end of this period only if the community's school committee voted for that person.

V. Local knowledge and curriculum development

The curriculum should provide for the integration of local knowledge and for the greater participation of parents and children in the dissemination of such local knowledge. Several parents are well-versed in a range of local knowledge forms such as forestry, agriculture, folk medicine, etc. They can be invited as occasional teachers, and the work and life patterns of the people can be integrated into the curriculum.

VI. Improving Supervision and Review of Schools

The education department needs to play a more proactive and vigilant role. The private and NGO schools were not inspected regularly. The education department 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. The education department needs to develop a mechanism by which the non-delivery of goods and materials meant for schools can be checked by members of the local elected bodies.

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More specifically, in the context of decentralisation of general administration, including the devolution of some powers to local elected bodies, the administration must seek to be continually involved in the functioning of schools and not adopt an indifferent attitude towards the condition of schools.

VII. 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 Gram Panchayat members, education committee members, and teachers can apply.

VIII. Block Awards for Schools

One way to sustain standards and quality in schools is to initiate awards 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.

IX. Decentralised Data Collection

Data and information regarding schools, such as accessibility, functioning, infrastructure needs, and dropouts, need to be stored and held at decentralised levels, such as the block. Allocation of resources, supervision and other support services to the neediest and

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most deprived areas can be prioritised through these measures. Data on low enrolment and attendance should include details about the socio-economic background of the schools, reasons for low performance, etc. The data can be updated through six-monthly reviews and inputs from headmasters/headmistresses and from the decentralised administrative structures. Such data should also be available at the school and local levels.



This report is based on field research conducted in Jaunpur, Uttarakhand 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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