Access of Poor Households to Primary Education in Rural India

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Abstract

The Planning Commission's premise that the growth in India has bypassed the weaker sections due to their ineffective access to the basic services like primary education needs to be tested against the evidence. Traditionally identified weaker section on social criteria (SC and ST population) seems to have a similar or relatively better access to the primary education. However, there is no direct evidence available for the weaker section on the economic criteria or the population living below poverty line (BPL). The present paper attempts to provide an empirical evidence for the premise of the Planning Commission from the household survey of BPL families in five states of India including the survey of primary schools for the same states and localities.

Our findings suggest that there is a problem of access of the poor (BPL) households to the primary education services in rural areas. Primary enrolment ratios among the children of poor households are considerably lower than the respective state average and also the aggregate enrolment ratio of the country. Our findings also reveal that the incentives such as mid-day meals, free textbooks and cash subsidies given by government schools to the poor children do actually reach them. The problem of insufficient effective access of the poor to primary education still persists. It calls for a change in the policy level thinking. Qualitative aspects like school infrastructural deficiencies and functioning of teachers having a direct bearing on the quality and access of education in the rural areas need urgent attention.

Keywords: Poor households, Primary education, Rural India.

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Access of Poor Households to Primary Education in Rural India

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I. Introduction

Primary education covering reading, writing and arithmetic is considered as a crucial aspect of quality of life. Elementary education, under the Indian constitution, is recognised as a fundamental right of individuals (Bajpai et.al, 2005). Thus it is imperative to ensure that every individual in the country is literate with primary education. The planning commission of India in its Approach Paper for the 11th Plan (2006) explicitly states, "large parts of our population are still to experience a decisive improvement in their standard of living. The percentage of the population below the poverty line is declining, but only at a modest pace. Far too many people still lack access to basic services such as health, education, clean drinking water and sanitation facilities without which they cannot be empowered to claim their share in the benefits of growth" (p.1). It also states that, "The provision of good quality education is most important equalizer in society and it is time we launched a major effort in this area" (p.75).

Total literacy with primary education would be possible through a complete coverage of all children in the primary education age group (6-11) through

compulsory enrolment in primary schooling. In India the overall gross enrolment ratio (GER) for the primary section was 104 % in 2005-06 but the net enrolment ratio (NER) for primary education was only 85% during the same period. The millennium development goals (MDG) attainment in India would require NER in primary education to be 100%. This would require quantitative and qualitative changes in the educational infrastructure in the rural areas. In India the proportion of schools with single classroom and single teacher schools was 14% and 18% respectively in rural area during 2005-06. The average student classroom ratio for rural schools was 43 students and was found more than 60 in 21% schools (State Report Card, 2005-06). However, it is not enough to provide the infrastructure and manpower in the rural areas to improve the primary education services, but its access to each and every section of the society needs to be assured.

As discussed earlier the Approach Paper for the 11th Plan asserts the need to ensure access of education services to the vulnerable section of the society. The vulnerable section is traditionally linked to the social criteria and hence with the scheduled castes/tribes (SC & ST). In this context it is quite relevant to check the enrolment ratios among SC and ST population and compare them to the overall ratio. Table 1 gives us the overall enrolment ratios along with the ones for the SC and ST population in primary education for each of the states and union territories of India. We find that the GER (estimated) for SC and ST population in the country is greater than that of the total population in almost all major states and also for the national average. Thus it seems that the section that is traditionally assumed to be vulnerable from social criteria does not have the problem of lower access to the primary education services than the rest of the population. The Approach Paper, therefore, could be right in its assertion only if the vulnerable section is defined on the basis of economic criteria rather than social criteria. The access to primary education services has to be checked among the poor and the poorest of the poor population especially in the rural areas. However, there is no direct evidence available that indicates the degree of

the reach of these services to the poor/weaker section in the rural areas of the country to justify such an assertion. It becomes essential to directly verify such a hypothesis regarding the extent of these services reaching the poor. This is because it has implications on policy options and measures to achieve the MDG. A household survey of the poor section in the rural areas of selected states of India would be required. A similar sample survey of some selected states has been conducted for the last three years covering by now 5 major states in India as a part of a larger study. The survey not only aimed at collecting quantitative information regarding the access but also to identify the qualitative aspects responsible for lower levels of enrolments among the children of the poor households.

The present paper attempts to identify the degree of the access of the vulnerable section (on economic criteria) to the primary education services. We use the information collected through the sample survey of poor households conducted in the five states of India so far providing evidence regarding the extent of primary education services reaching them. In the next section, we discuss the methodology used for the selection of the sample for the household survey. In the third section, we discuss the findings of the household survey regarding the enrolment of poor children in primary schools, reasons for their drop out and the incentives and facilities received from the government by the poor households. In the fourth section, we review the situation and discuss certain qualitative aspects of the public as well as private primary schools in and around the areas of the sampled households on the basis of a separate sample survey of such schools. It aims at pointing out reasons for the poor quality of education in the primary schools. The fifth and final section concludes the paper.

Table 1 : Enrolment Ratios for States of India : Overall and SC & ST, 2005 - 06				
State/UT	GER	NER	SC GER$^@$	ST GER$^@$
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	70.83	55.37	NA	76.08
Andhra Pradesh	96.84	75.28	106.57	126.3
Arunachal Pradesh	153.94	110.58	281.41	168.48
Assam	96.65	88.84	142.08	118.08
Bihar	92.44	84.13	92.03	130.77
Chandigarh	72.55	59.31	45.1	NA
Chhattisgarh	131.48	NA	151.82	138.58
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	123.73	93.82	268.13	116.47
Daman & Div	85.7	70.11	92.99	88.7
Delhi	89.57	65.81	58.98	NA
Goa	54.12	48.17	68.77	NA
Gujarat	100.3	78.89	100.99	117.06
Haryana	57.9	38.08	89.42	NA
Himachal Pradesh	110.53	87.29	123.63	141
Jammu & Kashmir	94.4	75.86	118.2	111.06
Jharkhand	123.58	63.66	144.41	155.76
Karnataka	93.58	83.97	108.49	101.43
Kerala *	76.16	63.9	93.34	139.1
Lakshadweep	87.39	69.33	NA	84.91
Madhya Pradesh	129.76	94.22	142.57	148.68
Maharashtra	96.82	79.32	128.22	112.81
Manipur	132.1	102.27	157.41	148.35
Meghalaya	132.83	94.01	288.48	140.87
Mizoram **	155.76	117.66	NA	156.46
Nagaland **	133.13	110.38	NA	138.21
Orissa	117.38	94.05	138.52	124.67
Pondicherry	79.54	56.66	74.99	NA
Punjab	65.34	51.78	102	NA
Rajasthan	112.72	81.52	126.17	133.4
Sikkim	138	94.54	190.98	240.15
Tamil Nadu	118.58	93.92	137.73	190.37
Tripura **	133.4	121	139.3	152.3
Utter Pradesh	107.27	97.74	135.66	NA
Uttaranchal	97	83.32	136.26	118.63
West Bengal	104.45	82.76	121.83	114.18
India	**103.77**	**84.53**	**113.16**	**110.58**
'*': Data not fully reported.				
'**': Technically NER cannot Exceed 100. NER above hundred may be because of the migration of 6-11 years from the surrounding areas after the last census.				
'@': Estimated ratio on basis of overall GER and proportion of SC and ST population in the age group 5-14.				
'NA': Not Available.				
Source: www.dpepmis.org and census 2001.				

II. Methodology of Household Survey

In order to get an idea of the situation of primary education and its provision among the weaker section of the population in the rural areas, a survey of households was conducted in five states – Madhya Pradesh (MP) and Uttar Pradesh (UP) in 2005, Rajasthan in 2006 and, Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Karnataka in 2007. These states were surveyed in different years as a part of a larger project[3]. These states were such that they covered a major proportion of population and geographical area of the country. UP is the most populous state in the country with 16.4% population of India and Rajasthan and MP are first and second largest states in terms of geographical area with 10.9% and 9.7% of the total area of the nation respectively. Similarly AP and Karnataka also have major proportion of population (7.4% and 5.5%) and the geographical area (8.7% and 6.1%) of India. In all, these five states form 40.1% of the total population and 42.8% of the total geographical area of the nation. Moreover, Rajasthan and UP are from the North India, MP from the Central India and AP and Karnataka are from the South India covering the diverse geographical canvas and cultures. Finally, MP, Rajasthan and UP belong to the so-called BIMARU states indicating economically poor and problematic states, whereas AP is economically average and Karnataka is economically better off state.

In each state one district was selected in consultation with the state government for detailed study. However for Rajasthan two districts were taken due to its special geographical features of desert region and tribal area. A sample survey of poor households and primary schools in each of the selected district was

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[3] The Hewlet foundation funded project jointly undertaken by the Earth Institute of the Columbia University, New York and Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad is on 'Scaling up Services in Rural India'.

conducted. It mainly aimed at getting an idea about type of primary education service availed by people (public or private), reasons for low enrolments in schools, coverage of various benefits provided by government, household expenditure on education, perceptions of the poor households regarding quality of the education services, etc.

In the second stage we selected five villages from each district .In order to cover the geographical spread of the district, we began by selecting 5 *talukas/tehseels* in each district and then selecting one village from each selected *taluka/tehseel*[4]. The villages were selected such that they reflect the condition of rural areas of the respective *taluka/tehseel* as closely as possible on various criteria such as percentage of SC and ST population, worker population ratio, female and overall literacy rate and sex ratio. The size of the village in terms of households and population was also considered so that it is neither too big nor too small compared to the average in the *taluka/tehseel*.

The sample for the survey was drawn from the households belonging to economically weaker section of the society. It, thus, became mandatory to identify the poor households in the selected villages. In MP and UP we selected the sample from the list of households living below poverty line (BPL) prepared by the district administration for the year 1997. However for the rest of the states we obtained the list of households from a detailed BPL survey that was conducted during 2002-03. It was called the BPL Census 2002 and was carried out in the entire nation[5]. The BPL Census collected information on the basis of a questionnaire covering various aspects. All the households were then given

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[4] The *taluka/tehseel* is an administrative unit in a district.

[5] In UP and MP, the results of this Census (2002-03) were not tabulated by the time we needed them to draw our sample. Hence, we had to use the alternative list readily available for the year 1997.

points/ranks for each question depending upon their responses. Table 2 gives the 13 questions and the pattern of awarding points for responses to each question. On the basis of the points it was found that any household below 15 points would be the weakest on all fronts i.e. the poorest of poor (POP). Moreover, considering the households that were not weak in all aspects but were overall poor, another cut off at 25 points was decided. Our sample mainly consisted of the POP families but, in order to fulfil the required size of our sample in each selected village, we sequentially added points to make the final cut off at 18 points. In all 1354 households were surveyed in 30 villages from the five states.

Sr.No	Questions	Points				
		0	1	2	3	4
1	Land (in Ha.)	No land	<1 non-irrigated <0.5 irrigated	1-2 non-irrigated <0.5 irrigated	2-5 non-irrigated 1-2.5 irrigated	>5 non-irrigated >2.5 irrigated
2	House type	No house	*Kachcha*	Partial *kachcha*	*Pukka*	City like
3	Cloths (per person)	<2	2-3	4-5	5-9	>10
4	Meals a day	<1	One but sometimes less	Once sufficient	Two but sometimes less	Sufficient food available
5	Toilet facility	Open space	Common toilet w/o water supply	Common toilet with water supply.	Common toilet with water supply & sweeper.	Personal toilet.
6	Consumer durables: TV, Elec. Fan, Pressure cooker, Radio.	None	Any one	Any two	Any 3 or all	All and more
7	Literacy level of most educated member of family.	Illiterate	5th standard	10th standard	Diploma	Professional
8	Labour situation in the family.	Bonded labour	Women & child labour	Only adult women labour.	Only adult man labour.	Other
9	Source of livelihood	Agricultural labour	Farmer	Rural artisan	Salary	Other

Table 2: Scheme of Awarding Points on Possible Responses in the BPL Survey, Rajasthan, 2005

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		Points				
Sr.No	Questions	0	1	2	3	4
10	Situation of children	Do not got to school & employed	Going to school and employed	Not going to school and not employed	Going to school but working.	Going to school and not working.
11	Type of debts	For daily use from non-insti. sources.	For agriculture from non-insti. sources.	For other use from non-insti. sources.	Only insti. Sources	No debts.
12	Reason for staying away from family.	Accidental work	For seasonal employment	Any other type of employ.	Not staying away.	Any other reason.
13	Requirement of aid.	For employment	For self-employment	For training and skill addition.	For housing.	Aid not required.
Source: BPL Survey, 2002-03.						

III. Findings of the Household Survey

We found from our sample that the average annual income of the households was quite low indicating that the selected households indeed belonged to the poorest of the poor population. However we found significant differences in the average annual incomes in our samples from different states. The average annual incomes in the three BIMARU states were Rs. 9777 in MP, Rs. 7924 in UP and about Rs. 15663 in Rajasthan, whereas it was Rs. 27973 in AP and Rs. 20377 in Karnataka. The literacy rates among the poor households were also considerably low. The literacy rates in our sample households were 52% for MP, 58% for UP, 37% for Rajasthan, 44% for AP and 41% for Karnataka. It is worth noting here that eventhough the overall literacy rates for these states differ marginally; they differ substantially for the poor population (See Table 3). It is interesting to see that the literacy rates in our sample of poor population are much lower in Rajasthan, AP and Karnataka than in UP and MP. The former are economically better off than the latter. The distance of the literacy rate among the poor from the average is considerably less in the economically less well-off states than among the economically better-off states. Thus, better economic condition in a state does not guarantee access of the poor to the primary education. In fact, it

seems to be associated with lower access! This clearly suggests that the states have to make special efforts to improve access of poor to primary education while achieving economic progress. Otherwise, growth could become non- inclusive and result in by-passing the poor in education.

Table 3: Literacy Rates in the Selected States			
States	**Overall LR**	**Rural Areas LR**	**LR among POP (Our Sample)**
1	2	3	4
MP	63.7	57.8	51.9
UP	56.3	52.5	58.4
Rajasthan	60.4	55.3	37.3
AP	60.5	54.5	43.9
Karnataka	66.6	59.3	41.2
Source: - Columns 2 and 3 from Census of India, 2001 and column 4 from Our Sample Survey.			

Out of the children in school going age in our sample, the proportion of children attending school was 92% in MP, 83% in UP and 79% in Rajasthan. This proportion for AP is 83% and for Karnataka just 56% which is the least among all the states. Thus, the proportion of children remaining out of the primary school among the poor is only 8% in MP, 17% in UP and AP, 21% in Rajasthan and as high as 44% in Karnataka. This is a very significant indicator of the lack of effective access of the poor to the primary education in the state.

It is possible to calculate the enrolment ratios from the data collected for the poor households in our sample. Table 4 shows the GER and NER for primary classes in our sample in the five selected states. We can see that the sample GERs in MP, UP and Rajasthan are marginally lower whereas for AP and Karnataka they are significantly lower than the national average. On the other hand, the sample NERs for all the states except UP are substantially less than the national average. However, comparing the GERs and NERs of the poor population with the aggregate ratios for the respective states from Table 1 above, we find significant differences in both ratios across all the states. We also find that these ratios differ for girls and boys in different states. In MP, Chittaugarh (Rajasthan)

and AP boys have relatively higher enrolments whereas, in UP, Jalore (Rajasthan) and Karnataka girls have relatively greater enrolment. In Karnataka, both GER and NER were found to be extremely low for boys in our sample which represent the children of the weaker section of society in the rural areas. The lower enrolment ratios among the poor households, compared to the average in the respective states provide a measure of the relative degree of access of the rural poor to primary education.

Table 4: GER and NER for Primary Classes in The Sample							
States/Districts		**GER**			**NER**		
		Boys	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**
MP	*Raisen*	98.0%	92.1%	94.9%	76.2%	74.6%	75.4%
UP	*Unnao*	96.3%	103.9%	99.7%	83.2%	83.1%	83.2%
Rajasthan	*Jalore*	86.0%	97.9%	91.7%	62.4%	76.9%	69.3%
	Chittaurgarh	98.0%	89.3%	94.3%	66.3%	58.7%	63.1%
AP	*Nalagonda*	87.4%	71.1%	80.5%	77.7%	67.1%	73.2%
Karnataka	*Chittradurga*	52.5%	84.5%	69.6%	46.5%	75.9%	62.2%
GER: - Gross Enrolment Ratio *NER: - Net Enrolment Ratio* *Source: - Household Survey 2005, 2006 and 2007*							

The non attendance or dropout from the school among the children of the poor households is due to various reasons. We collected responses from the households during our survey. Table 5 gives the distribution of the children not attending school by reasons. It shows that this distribution varies for different states. Among the various reasons, household (HH) activity is one of the commonly stated reasons mainly by girls.

Table 5 : Percentage of Children by Reason for Non-Attendance and Irregularity in Attending School									
State (District)		Household Activity	Employment	Sickness	Marriage	No Interest	Teacher Related	Other Reason	All
MP(Raisen)	Boys	15.79%	15.79%	-	-	31.58%	26.32%	10.53%	100%
	Girls	18.18%	18.18%	-	-	54.55%	9.09%	-	100%
	Total	16.67%	16.67%	-	-	40.00%	20.00%	6.67%	100%
UP(Unnao)	Boys	27.27%	54.55%	-	-	13.64%	-	4.55%	100%
	Girls	60.87%	17.39%	-	-	8.70%	-	13.04%	100%
	Total	44.44%	35.56%	-	-	11.11%	-	8.89%	100%
Rajasthan (Jalore)	Boys	6.40%	10.90%	20.90%	-	28.20%	13.60%	20.00%	100%
	Girls	31.70%	2.40%	28.00%	-	18.30%	2.40%	17.20%	100%
	Total	17.20%	7.30%	24.00%	-	24.00%	8.80%	18.70%	100%
Rajasthan (Chittaurgarh)	Boys	2.10%	23.20%	18.90%	-	25.30%	1.00%	29.50%	100%
	Girls	32.80%	12.50%	10.90%	-	14.10%	3.10%	26.60%	100%
	Total	14.50%	18.90%	15.70%	-	20.80%	1.80%	28.30%	100%
AP (Nalagonda)	Boys	3.7%	81.48%	-	-	7.41%	-	7.41%	100%
	Girls	18.75%	75.00%	-	6.25%	-	-	-	100%
	Total	11.86%	77.97%	-	3.39%	3.39%	-	3.39%	100%
Karnataka (Chittradurga)	Boys	1.39%	55.56%	1.39%	-	11.11%	-	30.55%	100%
	Girls	15.84%	46.53%	0.99%	1.98%	8.91%	-	25.75%	100%
	Total	9.83%	50.29%	1.16%	1.16%	9.82%	-	27.74%	100%
Source: - Household Survey 2005, 2006 and 2007									

Although it is not a major reason for the total children (boys and girls combined), it is a significant cause for girls in the poor households to drop out. Another reason stated, which is again common in all the states, is the employment of children in the school going age. This proportion is high in UP (35.56%), AP (77.97%) and Karnataka (50.29%) and considerably low in MP and Rajasthan. Sacrificing school for employment is a clear indicator of the poor economic condition of the families. These two causes together imply that an economic compulsion of the family is an important determinant of school dropouts among the poor. Sickness is also another reason for absence of children from schools. However it is mainly in the two districts of Rajasthan where children have stated sickness as a reason – 24% in Jalore and 16% in Chittaurgarh. Jalore, which is a desert region, has the highest proportion of children in this category. In Karnataka this proportion is very low (1%). The reason of marriage has been stated by girls only in the southern states of AP and Karnataka with very small proportions of 3% and 1% respectively. No interest in school is also a reason given with a relatively higher proportion of boys stating it in all the states other than MP. In fact in MP it is the major reason with 40% of total children stating it for their absence in school. Also in Rajasthan this proportion is significant. Both these states have considerable amount of tribal population that probably does not give enough importance to primary education. The teacher related reason implies the irregularity in presence of teacher(s) as they do not stay in the village and commute from the nearby urban locations. This has a direct effect on the functioning of the schools specifically in the case of single teacher schools.

The category of 'other reason' accounts for a significant proportion in Rajasthan and Karnataka. Although this reason is common among children in all states, its percentage is low in MP, UP and AP. 'Other reasons' include the distance to the school, grazing of cattle, helping on family farms and sickness of some other family member. The school distance is more related to girls than boys as parents are reluctant to send their adolescent girls to relatively far off schools i.e., about 2 to 5 kms. The problem of distance is relevant in the case of upper primary and secondary schools since most villages have primary schools. However during the

school survey we also found some primary schools located somewhat far away from the village settlement.

Among the children attending the schools a major proportion went to the public/government schools. In MP 97.7% and in UP 87.8% children went to public school. In the two districts of Rajasthan, 92.6% in Jalore and 95.3% in Chittaurgarh went to public school. For the southern states the proportions were 93.2% and 88.5% for AP and Karnataka respectively. The proportion of children being sent to private schools varies from about 2% in MP, 5% to 7% in Rajasthan and AP and nearly 12% in Karnataka and UP. As per our discussions with the households during the survey, we found that the people do consider private schools to be better than government schools in terms of quality of education and facilities. However, the cost of education in the private schools as compared to government schools, in terms of fees and other expenditures, is much higher. Moreover, the poor were induced to send their children to the government schools because they received certain incentives such as textbooks, cash subsidies, uniforms, mid-day meals, etc. Considering all such costs – direct and indirect – of sending the children to the private school particularly for the families below poverty line, the fact that about 2 to 12% of poor families sent their children to private primary schools is an eye-opener. It indicates two things: one, the poor families do value education; and two, there is a significant difference in perceived quality of education between the public and private schools.

We enquired with these households for the type of incentives their children received from the government schools. Table 6 gives us the percentage distribution of children receiving the incentives in all the five states.

Table 6: Incentives Received by Children of Poor Households Attending Schools						
Incentives	**MP**	**UP**	**Rajasthan**		**AP**	**Karnataka**
	Raisen	Unnao	Jalore	Chittaurgarh	Nalagonda	Chittradurga
% Getting Cash Subsidy	57.1%	86.4%	0%	36.8%	4.6%	61.5%
% Getting Midday meals	75.5%	88.6%	77.2%	71.8%	70.4%	81.8%
% Getting Textbooks	96.6%	93%	97.8%	102.7% *	88.5%	84.9%
% Getting Uniform	45.6%	2.2%	0%	0%	1.2%	84.4%
'*': Due to drop out after receiving textbooks.						
Source:- Household Survey 2005, 2006 and 2007						

We can see that the children of the weaker sections in the rural areas of all these states do receive benefits of midday meals and free textbooks. The midday meals benefit is given to students of the primary section only whereas the figures in the table pertain to all children of the poor households attending schools. It was found that the free textbooks were available to almost all eligible students in our sample. This is because the proportion of students in public schools matches with the proportion receiving the free textbooks indicating a near complete coverage. In fact in UP and Rajasthan the proportion of children receiving free textbooks is slightly greater than the students actually going to public school. This means that there is a possibility that some families registered their children's name in public schools to avail benefits, but actually sent them to private schools. The incentive of cash subsidies was also given to substantial number of children in MP, UP, Rajasthan (Chittaurgarh) and Karnataka. A significant number of children also received school uniforms but only in MP and Karnataka. Thus, the access of the poor children to various incentives in primary school is not problematic.

Apart from the incentives, our survey also reveals details regarding the access of certain school facilities to the children of the poor households. Table 7 summarizes the finding regarding the same for different states.

Table 7: Access to Primary School Facilities among Children of Poor Households						
Facilities	**MP**	**UP**	**Rajasthan**		**AP**	**Karnataka**
	Raisen	Unnao	Jalore	Chittaurgarh	Nalagonda	Chittradurga
% Getting School Supplies	2.3%	1.1%	0%	0%	0%	3.2%
% Getting Transport facility	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	11.1%
% Getting Library facility	7.6%	1.9%	33.2%	43.2%	3.2%	23.5%
% Getting Sports facility	19.3%	13.3%	48.7%	43.2%	4.7%	37.3%
Source:- Household Survey 2005, 2006 and 2007						

The facilities of school supplies and transport are not prevalent in any of the states. In Karnataka, it seems that the students of private schools get transport facility since the government schools do not provide any such facilities. The library and the sports facilities are available in Rajasthan and Karnataka but in other states their supply to the poor is quite low. Thus we find that the access of the poor children to these primary school facilities is quite limited.

The average annual expenditures on education by households were Rs. 421 for MP, Rs.473 for UP. This expenditure was significantly different in two districts of Rajasthan with Rs 474 in Jalore and Rs.179 for Chittaurgarh. In AP it was Rs.798 and for Karnataka it was Rs.787. Since these figures are for different points of time and with states of different income levels, we should consider the percentage of household income spent on education. The percentages are 4.31% (MP), 5.97% (UP), 2.06% (Rajasthan – 2.93 Jalore & 1.18% Chittaurgarh), 2.85% (AP) and 3.86% (Karnataka). The expenditure per child on education had large differences in these states. It was as low as Rs. 198 in MP to a high of Rs.921 in Karnataka. In UP, Rajasthan and AP it was Rs. 227, Rs. 300 and Rs.758 respectively.

IV. Sample Survey of Schools and its Findings

Along with the household survey, a detailed sample survey of primary schools was also conducted in all the five selected states. During our field visit we decided to cover primary schools in and around the selected village for household survey. Categorising broadly, we covered mainly two types of schools – government primary schools and private primary schools. In all we covered about 155 government and 46 private primary schools in all the states. This survey was conducted to get an idea about the quantity and quality of infrastructure and manpower in government and private schools in the rural areas. We also gathered information regarding some other qualitative aspects relevant to the schools in their functioning through discussions and observations along with the formal questionnaire.

Our findings revealed that the physical infrastructure in some of the government schools was in dilapidated condition, especially in the northern states. The classrooms were not in usable condition and hence the students were made to sit in the *verandas* or sometimes even on the ground outside the school. We found one primary school in Rajasthan having no building at all. Such schools could not function regularly during the rainy season or even at time of acute hot and cold weather conditions. It was also found that most of the government schools had inadequate number of classrooms in the school building. This was either because of poor maintenance of the older classrooms and hence could not be used, or due to use of one of the classrooms as a store room of food grains and other material for the mid-day meal purpose. Inadequacy of the teachers was also a problem faced by the government primary schools in common in all the five states. In some of the cases we have found primary schools functioning with a single teacher and also sometimes with a single classroom. The availability of supportive infrastructure such as separate toilets for boys and girls, drinking water and electricity was also found to be absent in some of the government

schools. These factors had a definite impact on the functioning and the quality of education in these schools.

An important aspect brought out during the school survey was that majority of the teachers of primary schools did not stay in the village where the school was located. They commuted from the nearby urban locations. This would have a direct effect on the functioning of the school since regular presence of the teacher is not guaranteed for various reasons. In case of a single teacher school, the school may not function at all if the teacher staying in another village/town fails to come. Hence this has a direct impact on the quality of education in these villages. In our survey we found nearly 59% of government primary school teachers in MP, 54% in UP, 60% in AP and 70% in Karnataka who stayed in another village[6]. In Rajasthan this proportion were quite different for the two districts. While in Jalore (desert area) only 35% government school teachers did not stay in the village, in Chittaurgarh (tribal district) this proportion was 75%. This proportion for private schools is significantly low. In MP all the teachers of private school were found to be staying in the same village.

Another point regarding quality of education in primary schools is that we found most of the government primary schools having the system of multiple classes being conducted simultaneously in the same room. This implies that students of more than one standard are made to sit in a combined class taken by a single teacher due to insufficient number of classrooms and/or teachers. This raises a definite question over the amount of attention that the teacher would be able to give to the students. The problem of multiple classes has a specific relevance in the case of single teacher schools and also to the absenteeism of teachers in other primary schools. We found majority of government primary schools of our

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[6] This phenomenon has a direct relation with our household survey where children do give absenteeism of teacher as a reason for irregular or non-attendance in school.

sample in all the five selected states having this system. However, the situation in private schools is totally different irrespective of the state. None of the private schools in any of the states have reported multiple class system being practised.

During our survey we found some of the primary schools located at a distance from the village. This was specifically found in the northern states. E.g. one of the schools in Chittaurgarh district of Rajasthan was about 1.5 km away from the village it belonged to. This acted as a discouraging factor for students to attend schools as it was inconvenient for them to reach. Earlier in the household survey we found students giving distance to school as a reason for irregular attendance particularly in case of the girl child. However in the southern states the primary schools were located in the village. In Karnataka we found that in case a village was spread over a larger area, there were multiple schools. In one of the schools in Karnataka, although the main school building was outside the village, the primary section was built separately within the village.

The teachers of the government primary schools are generally involved in a number of non-teaching activities. Through discussions we found that they had to do election related work such as preparation of voters' list, identity cards and election duties, demography related work such as population surveys, animal surveys, economic surveys and even medical work such as pulse polio immunization. They were also involved in many community based activities in the villages at regular intervals. This is because the school teachers were the most educated and qualified persons available at the village level. These activities were although not a part of their routine, they had to spend a day or more for the work. The school during these days, therefore, did not work regularly or perhaps not at all. Although these activities do not waste much time of the teachers, they do affect the continuity of teaching. As a result both students and teachers tend to loose interest ultimately affecting the overall quality of education.

Another issue that we came across in the survey was about the difference in enrolment of girls in public and private schools. Apart from the large difference in the average enrolments of students in private and public schools, we found that the ratio of girls to the boys in private school was much lower than that in public schools. The ratio of number of girls per 100 boys in private schools was 83 in MP, 81 in UP, 83 in Karnataka and 78 in AP. In the two districts of Rajasthan this ratio was found to be lowest with 32 in Jalore and 53 in Chitttaurgarh. On the other hand the same ratio for government schools was 107, 95 and 83 for MP, UP and Rajasthan and, 107 and 90 for AP and Karnataka respectively. This clearly indicated that parents preferred boys over girls for affording better quality of education in the private schools. Thus, in case of the households sending their one child to public schools and the other one to private, the probability of the child going to private school being a boy is almost one.

V. Conclusion

In the present paper, we have attempted direct verification of the Planning Commission's basic premise that progress in this country in social sectors by-passed weaker sections and thus it was not inclusive. The weaker section did not have effective access to basic services like primary education. The definition of 'weaker section', however, was not clear. Traditionally it is defined in terms of social criteria and hence it would include SC and ST population. Because of this separate data are collected and regularly reported about these categories on various parameters including literacy and enrolment. It appears that these categories had higher or similar access to the primary education in the country from the available evidence. Thus, the 'weaker sections' referred to by the Planning Commission must be defined in economic terms and should include people living below poverty line (BPL). However, direct data collection and reporting is not yet regularly done for this category perhaps because their exact identification based on objective criteria is problematic. With a massive effort in

terms of BPL Census at national level conducted in 2002-03, it became possible to get some idea about different parameters for this category.

In the present paper, we applied BPL criteria for the 'weaker section' and used the results of a large sample survey of BPL families in 5 different states to directly get some evidence on the premise of the Planning Commission. Our finding is that this category (BPL) does have serious problem of insufficient access to primary education. In terms of literacy, we found that economic progress alone does not guarantee improved access of the poor to education. The effort and policies need to be focussed, therefore, on improvement in access of the poor population to the services. The overall enrolment ratios in primary section, both for the states and of the nation, could be a result of the lower enrolments among the children of the poor households. This is evident from the lower enrolment figures among the children of the poor population in our sample. However, our finding from the sample of the BPL families has shown that several incentives given by the government to induce children of poor families to attend primary schools regularly seem to be reaching the target group remarkably well. Thus the benefits like mid-day meal and free textbooks in the government schools reach almost all children in the primary schools even in the BPL households. The coverage of BPL households even in other benefits like free school uniforms, cash subsidies and free school supplies was also found to be substantial from our BPL household survey. Thus we can conclude that problem of insufficient effective access of the poor to the primary education and enrolment still persists in spite of such incentives offered by the government to the BPL families. This calls for change in the policy level thinking addressing other aspects to alleviate the problem. In this context, it is important to note our findings from the sample survey of primary schools in the same localities regarding some problems pertaining to the facilities and quality of education in the government primary schools. The major problems we found with government primary schools in almost all states were: frequent absenteeism and irregularity of school teachers since several of them do not stay in the same village as the school; pathetic

physical conditions of school buildings and classrooms; insufficient and inadequate number of classrooms per school to accommodate all the standards in different rooms and hence system of having multiple standards in the same room at the same time; prevalence of several single teacher schools; innumerable non-teaching activities thrust on school teachers that divert their attention, punctuality and regularity in teaching the students; inadequate supportive infrastructure in the school like toilet for boys and girls separately, drinking water facility and electricity. All these adversely affect the quality of education provided by the government primary schools and severely discourage pupils from attending. An important step in this regard is the estimation of the required scaling up effort in the rural areas of the country to increase provisioning of physical infrastructural facilities and ensuring adequate manpower supply and thereby improving the effective access of the poor to the primary education services ultimately leading to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

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