

Dalit
Studies 3

SOCIAL HIERARCHY AND NOTION OF EDUCABILITY



P D Singh
Sanjay Kumar

Experiences of Teachers and Children
from Marginalized and
Non-marginalised Communities

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Social Hierarchy and Notion of Educability

**Experiences of Teachers and Children from
Marginalized and Non-Marginalized Communities
in Schools in Gaya, Bihar, India**

**P D Singh
Sanjay Kumar**

Acknowledgements

This report marks a step forward in our endeavour to deepen our understanding of the issues and challenges in educational development of children from marginalized communities, and develop context-specific programmes to address them. A beginning in this direction was made by Deshkal Society in 2003 through a project on Reconstructing Contents and Methods of Teaching for Dalit Children. During this project we were confronted with many questions which needed further critical inquiry. This study provided the opportunity to delve deeper into the issues and develop a systematic analysis of the educational experiences and outcomes of children from marginalised communities.

In this journey we have received cooperation and inputs from numerous scholars, policy makers and practitioners, both from the government and non-governmental sectors. We express our gratitude to all of them. Although it is not possible to mention all the names, nevertheless we are especially grateful to Upendra Singh of Gram Nirman Kendra, a civil society organization in Gaya, Bihar for readily sharing experiences of his innovative experiment in schooling the Musahar community children. Our discussions with him, and the teaching- learning materials and teacher guidebooks of the GNK, provided us valuable insights for conceptualizing and developing this research project.

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Abbreviations

AIE	Alternative Innovative Education
BCF	Bihar Curriculum Framework
BEEP	Bihar Elementary Education Project
BEP	Bihar Education Project
BRC	Block Resource Centre
CRC	Cluster Resource Centre
DIET	District Institute of Education and Training
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
SC	Scheduled Caste
SCERT	State council of Educational Research and Training
SSA	<i>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan</i>
ST	Scheduled Tribe
UEE	Universalisation of Elementary Education
UPE	Universal Primary Education
VEC	Village Education Committee

Executive Summary

This research study focused on developing a contextualized understanding and explanation of school-based processes and practices behind the educational failure of children, especially children from marginalized communities. The study was based on qualitative data from two government-run rural primary schools—the Badka Bandh Primary School and the Majhauri Primary School, located in the Wazirganj block of Gaya district, Bihar. The Badka Bandh school, situated in a Musahar village, consisted of children from mainly marginalized communities, particularly, Dalits, lower castes and Musahars. The Majhauri school consisted of children from both marginalized and non-marginalised communities, and was located in an upper caste village.

The research study adopted primarily an ethnographic approach to data generation through participatory processes of observation, interviews, discussions, focus group interviews and workshops. While the ethnographic method was adopted to gather the experiential and lived realities of the children, the teachers and the communities, quantitative data was used to situate the particularities of narratives within the larger context of village, locality, block and district.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the study indicate a need for focusing attention on transforming classroom practices and process of teaching and learning in order to ensure meaningful and sustainable school participation of children and enhanced learning achievement. The report identifies five key areas of concern for policy makers and practitioners:

i. **The need to move away from a ‘deficit’ model of learning to an enabling discourse:**

A majority of school teachers in the study believe in the concept of heredity-based ‘educability’ of children which is articulated through their notion of hereditary ‘sanskara’. Although the caste factor is not directly referred to, the teachers’ explanations of hereditary ‘sanskara’ clearly reveals the caste underpinnings behind this notion. Based on this belief, teachers perceive children from marginalized communities as being ‘learning deficient’ or ‘uneducable’. As a result, they have very low or no expectation

A majority of school teachers in the study believe in the concept of heredity-based ‘educability’ of children which is articulated through their notion of hereditary ‘sanskara’.

There is a need to work with teachers on their attitude and expectations from children of marginalized and non-marginalized communities, and to recognize and value the existing reality of social context and differentiation in the classroom.

of learning achievement from these children. They attribute the poor academic performance of these children to their hereditary 'sanskara', and have developed an attitude of 'indifference and unconcern' towards them. There is a need to work with teachers on their attitude and expectations from children of marginalized and non-marginalized communities, and to recognize and value the existing reality of social context and differentiation in the classroom. Teacher training at present does not appear to provide teachers with an understanding of marginality and its socio-historical context, nor emphasize the responsibility of the teacher towards student learning.

- ii. **The need to move away from teacher- and text-centered classroom to learner-centered classroom:** The current classroom transaction processes of teaching and learning are characterized by the centrality of the teacher and the textbook whereby rote-learning and memorization, copying and repetition form the basic learning activities. Teaching means transmission of facts and knowledge contained in the textbooks. The whole emphasis is on reproduction of textual knowledge without comprehending and understanding the meaning. The teacher is the sole communicator, and children's voices and experiences do not find expression in the classroom. Any knowledge other than that in the textbooks is branded as irrelevant and worthless. There appears little effort to draw parallels between the content of lessons in the textbooks and the experiences from everyday life and socio-economic context of the children. This teaching-learning process alienates children from the learning process, demotivates them, adversely affects their learning potential and achievement, and gradually pushes them out of the school.

There is a need to recognize that children are capable of constructing, and do construct, their own knowledge. The role of the school and the teacher should be to enable and facilitate this process through guidance and support. A child-centered pedagogic approach based on the concept of activity-based learning and use of contextual teaching-learning material needs to be initiated and practiced in the schools. Experiments in Tamil Nadu can be built upon in this regard. Such a pedagogic approach gives primacy to children's active participation in the learning process and their voices and experiences. It allows children to engage in group-learning, peer-learning and self-motivated learning, where children are constantly challenged to think and find solutions. It aids to increase the pace of learning and enhances the learning capacity and achievement of children. The learning materials chosen, however, should be contextual and available from local resources so that there's flexibility for the teacher and the child to adapt them to suit their needs.

There is a need to recognize that children are capable of constructing, and do construct, their own knowledge.

Further, instead of a single standardized textbook prescribed at the state level, there is a need for a package of teaching-learning materials that are contextual, can relate to the child's socio-economic context and experiences, and engage them in active learning. A bottom-up approach should be followed whereby teachers, children and the local community are actively involved in the process.

- iii. **The need to move away from home support-based teaching-learning to school-centred teaching-learning:** The present teaching practices are based on home support. It is assumed that children will get academic support from parents/home in developing reading and writing skills. However, as first-generation learners from poor and illiterate wage-labour families, children from the marginalized communities lack this home support.

Ideally, the school has to become the central place of learning for these children.

Due to their failure to complete the homework given by the school, these children are often a target of ire and rebuke from teachers as well as peers, which adversely affects their self-worth. The current teaching practices are, therefore, not feasible for enhancing the meaningful and sustainable school participation of children, especially from marginalized communities.

Ideally, the school has to become the central place of learning for these children. The activity-based learning method and contextual teaching-learning materials will be important initiatives through which the school can be converted into the central place of learning. However, even then, children from marginalized communities might need extra learning support, at least initially, in order to cope with the learning processes. This support can be provided to them by establishing learning centers which can act as proxies for home support. These centers can provide them learning support for two hours in the evening and can be run by involving the local community in its planning and management.

- iv. **The need for teacher education on marginality and diversity:** Teachers appear to have little understanding of marginality and its socio-historical context. They do not recognize the reality of socio-economic differentiation and diversity within the classroom. Teachers say with confidence that they are non-discriminating and progressive, and that they treat all children equally. This is different from valuing each child equally. In a situation where there is social differentiation among children, treating each child equally would mean not recognizing, and not being sensitive to the differential learning needs and abilities of children. Such a perspective does not give the teachers the skill to deal with differentiation within the classroom. They view their professional accountability in terms of only transmission of content, without any concern for the resulting learning achievement of children.

There is a critical need to work with the teachers' attitudes and orientations. There

There is a need to help teachers develop an understanding of the different dimensions of marginality and diversity, and implementing this understanding in actual classroom practices and processes.

is a need to help teachers develop an understanding of the different dimensions of marginality and diversity, and implementing this understanding in actual classroom practices and processes.

v. **The need to build and strengthen organic school-community relationship:** The study indicates that teachers try to put the blame for the educational failure of children on the lack of interest among parents, as well as the ‘ineducability’

of the children. On the other hand, parents were found to be aware of the low quality of teaching prevalent in the schools. The parents accuse the teachers of lack of concern towards their children’s learning. This has led to an antagonistic relationship between the schools and the communities. The current government provisions for empowering local communities and promoting their active involvement in the planning and management of schools through the VECs is found to be largely ineffective. Parents, particularly from marginalized communities, feel powerless within the local power structure and relations, and are unable to become active participants in school affairs and influence its decisions. The schools need to develop an attitude of accountability towards communities and be oriented towards building a cordial and organic relationship with them by encouraging active involvement of communities in the planning and management of school affairs.

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The study concludes with strategies to tackle attitudes of indifference and traditional pedagogic practices based on rote-learning and the centrality of the teacher and the textbook, which have adversely affected the learning motivation and achievement of children from all communities. The suggested action research programme includes school-based workshops

with teachers to develop their skills and orientations in activity-based methods and creating relevant materials; setting up of learning support centres for children; development of a toolkit on marginality and diversity for teachers; and eventually a broad-based teacher development programme which would enable teachers to themselves experience democratic, activity-based and inclusive learning.

Introduction

The impetus for this study by the Deshkal Society was our work in the Musahar Communityⁱ in Gaya district of Bihar, where we were trying to explain the low literacy rate amongst this community of bonded labourers and find ways to raise this. We came across committed educators such as Dwarko Sundarani who believes that ‘sanskara’ⁱⁱ is responsible for the lack of achievement among the Musahars, despite efforts at segregating them and taking them away from their ‘culture’ in residential schools.

Our discussions with Dwarko Sundarani about his perception and experience with regard to the education of Musahar children revealed the prevalence of the notion of ‘ineducability’ of children from Musahar community due to their hereditary ‘sanskara’. Even a well-meaning and committed educator like him believed in this notion. Due to their ‘sanskara’ Musahar children were seen not to have an interest in learning, and it was a challenge for Sundarani to keep them in the school. However, one can raise the inverse question about the ‘sanskara’ of schools which do not interest Musahar children, which alienate them and push them out.

These revelations pushed us to explore of the nature and characteristics of school curriculum and the school environment and ethos. We realized that an analysis of the classroom transactions of teaching and learning, of the teaching methods, the teacher-student and teacher-community relationship, and the role played by the notion of heredity-based educability was important for developing a clear understanding of the processes behind the educational failure of and exclusion of children from marginalized communities.

Structure of the Report

This report presents the findings of a pilot study carried out in two State-run rural primary schools in Bihar, India. The study sought to develop a contextualized understanding of the processes behind the educational failure of children from marginalized and non-marginalized communities. We were particularly interest in examining the role of

The study sought to develop a contextualized understanding of the processes behind the educational failure of children from marginalized and non-marginalized communities. We were particularly interest in examining the role of the notion of heredity-based educability of children in determining the nature of specific practices and processes in the classrooms and the school, and analysing its implications in the educational experiences of children, especially of those from marginalized communities.

It was believed that the participation of Untouchables and Sudras in education would make knowledge impure and therefore they were denied access to learning

the notion of heredity-based educability of children in determining the nature of specific practices and processes in the classrooms and the school, and analysing its implications in the educational experiences of children, especially of those from marginalized communities.

Chapter 1 provides an outline of the methodology adopted for the study. It describes the research objectives and the schools selected for the case study. Chapter 2 discusses the issues and challenges of curriculum reforms and teacher development in the context of the rapid expansion of elementary education and increased access to schooling, especially, for children from marginalized communities. It discusses how these issues and challenges are dealt with by government policies and what initiatives have been taken to address them. Chapter 3 presents a discussion and analysis of the case studies of two schools. Based on an analysis of primary data generated through field work in the two case study schools as well as quantitative secondary data available from government records and documents at school, block and district level, this chapter discusses the changing social context of the classroom and the school, and examines the role of the notions of heredity-based educability in determining the nature and characteristics of specific practices and processes in the classrooms and the schools and its impact on the school ethos and environment, and the educational experiences of children from marginalized and non-marginalized communities. The formal classroom transaction processes and practices of teaching and learning are also discussed and their implications for learning-motivation and achievement of children from diverse social backgrounds are analysed.

Chapter 4 provides a summary of the findings of the study, while Chapter 5 outlines the areas for intervention emerging from the research, and suggests concrete programmes that can be taken up for transforming the existing teaching-learning practices and processes, enhancing school effectiveness and improving learning achievement of children from marginalized and non-marginalized communities.

The Context and the Problem

The notion of children's ascribed learning potential and innate 'educability' has been considered by education theorists in the US as an important factor for understanding and exploring the educational outcome of children from disadvantaged groups in the context of race and ethnicity (Sleeter, 2005). In India, educational inequality in terms of caste is an established fact. Analysis of educational data points to the fact that the Scheduled Castes (SCs) or the Untouchables continue to occupy the lowest position among caste Hindus. The root of educational deprivation of SCsⁱⁱⁱ can be traced to their position as untouchables in the caste structure of the traditional Hindu society based on the principles of purity and impurity. SCs were the most impure castes who were hereditarily assigned the most polluting occupations. They were denied any access to or the right to own productive assets such as land and economically were completely dependent on the

higher castes that they served. It was believed that the participation of Untouchables and Sudras in education would make knowledge impure and therefore they were denied access to learning (Shah et al., 2006).

In recent decades, various studies, reports and documents have revealed that in the classroom, curriculum delivery and pedagogy, children—especially those belonging to the marginalized communities—are subjected to various forms of discrimination and humiliation which severely affects their self-respect and self-confidence in the contemporary mainstream government schools in India. Children have narrated painful stories of their experiences in the classroom, as well as shown resistance to the same against the teachers (Probe Report, 1999; Nambissan, 2001; Govinda, 2002). Some children have to go through violent experiences in the classroom inflicted on them by the teachers as well as by other classmates from dominant castes. A study of schools in Uttar Pradesh by Dreze and Gazdar (1996) reported that teachers refused to touch SC children; these children were subjected to verbal abuse and physical punishment by teachers; and they were frequently beaten by their upper caste classmates.

Rakesh was always viewed and treated in the school as the son of the Mehtar community, which does cleaning work. Tired of fighting the stigma, Rakesh gave up his studies.



A teacher transmitting knowledge to children

A study conducted in Badka village of Harda district in Madhya Pradesh (Ojha, 2003) reported that there were five Valmiki families whose children had never gone to school. Even those who went didn't continue for long. In one instance, a child excreted in the school and the teacher asked Rakesh, a Valmiki boy, to clean up the mess. When he refused, the teacher beat him up. The next day Rakesh's father told the teacher that he would clean the toilet but that he should not ask his son to do such work. But there was no change in the teacher's attitude. Rakesh was always viewed and treated in the school as the son of the Mehtar community, which does cleaning work. Tired of fighting the stigma, Rakesh gave up his studies (Ojha, 2003).

There is a long history of such acts of insult and violence in mainstream schools against children of the marginalized communities which reinforces the caste-based hierarchical social structure. A glimpse into this history can be gained from organic writers associated with the marginalized communities who have written in detail of their childhood memories of the school environment and the various insulting and degrading situations that they experienced (More, 2001; Limbawale, 2003; Pawar, 2003; Balmiki, 2003). Omprakash Balmiki, a Dalit writer, wrote in his novel *Joothan*:

One day Headmaster Kaliram called me to his room and asked: 'Hey, what is your name?'

'Omprakash', I answered, slowly and fearfully. Children used to feel scared just encountering the Headmaster. The entire school was terrified of him.

'You are a Churah?' the Headmaster threw his second question at me.

'ji'.

'All right ... That teak tree there. Climb that tree, break some branches and make a broom. And sweep the whole school clean as a mirror. It is a family occupation. Go ... do it pronto.'....

The third day I went to the class and sat down quietly. After a few minutes, his loud thundering was heard: 'O ***ing Churah, where are you hiding...? Your mother...' (Balmiki, 2003, p. 53.)

This narrative reinforces the fact that even parents from marginalized communities who visited schools faced the same humiliation and insult inflicted upon their children. The narrative suggests that teachers, in their relationship with Dalit children, tend to reproduce the discriminatory attitudes and practices in the school which underlie caste relations in society. M. Murali Krishna narrates a day in his own school thus:

Early one summer morning, when the schools were running on summer time and worked for a half-day, i.e. 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., a bunch of hostel students came half an hour late to school. They explained to the headmaster that they were late because the breakfast was served late in their hostel as they were short of workers. But the headmaster battered them ruthlessly, scolding them, saying that they were born only to eat. He told them to decide between food and education. The headmaster said: 'You lazybones, you come all the way here from villages and join the government hostel to fill your bellies, wander on roads, and watch movies. That's all. You will never study. You cannot study either. You should be sent to look after cattle; that is the right place for you' (Krishna, 2007).

However, in recent years the accounts of classroom practices and processes in government-run primary schools, especially in the rural areas, indicate a changing reality of children's, particularly marginalized community children's educational realities. Children's daily experiences of the classroom and the school, of the teacher and the school environment are no longer the same as that of their parents. The social context of the schools which were a part of this research study indicates that significant changes have taken place in this region primarily and Bihar in general, in the relationship between the schools and the marginalized community children since the 1980s and 1990s. The access of marginalized community children to government-run primary schools has increased considerably. At least one primary school can now be found within one kilometre of most habitations, including those of the Dalit community. The teacher-pupil ratio has improved with the appointment of a large number of teachers. Parents from marginalized communities are now aware of the importance of their children's education as well as worried about the quality of teaching and learning that goes on in the schools.

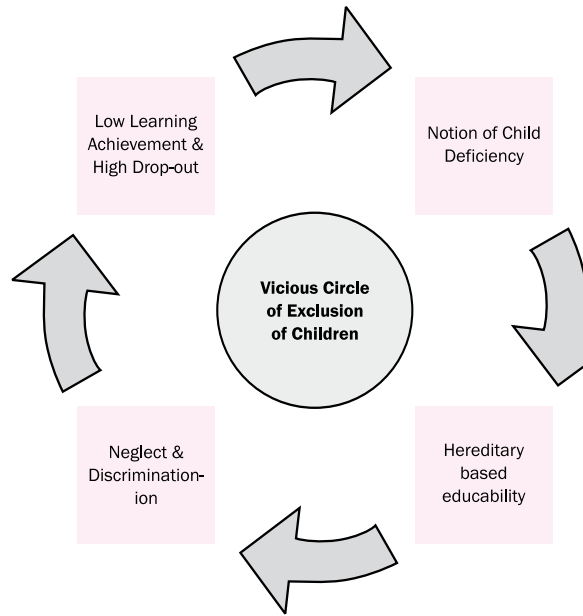
While these positive changes have taken place, at the same time, an attitude of indifference and unconcern towards children's learning still prevails in the schools. This indifference and lack of concern can be located and explained by the dominant belief among teachers of children's ascribed learning potential and hereditary 'educability'. Teachers articulate this concept through their belief in the notion of 'sanskara', which is considered a hereditary attribute transferred from parents to children, from generation to generation. If parents have good 'sanskara' their children will also have good 'sanskara'. Further, teachers relate good 'sanskara' with the learning ability and interest of children. A cyclical argument is presented in this regard: 'good sanskara' comes from education and education is not possible without 'good sanskara'. Because parents from marginalized communities are illiterate, they do not have good 'sanskara'. As they themselves do not have 'good sanskara' they cannot inculcate the same in their children. And since these children do not have good 'sanskara' they cannot study and learn. Finally because 'sanskara' is hereditary these children are hereditarily 'uneducable'. Although the caste factor is not directly referred to, the teachers' explanations of hereditary 'sanskara' clearly reveals the caste underpinnings of this notion. Through these cyclical arguments, teachers construct their perception of children from the marginalized communities as being 'learning deficient' or 'uneducable'. And based on this perception, teachers have very low or no expectations of learning achievement from these children. This phenomenon takes the shape of a vicious circle which is revealed in Figure 1.

The teachers' lack of concern severely affects children's learning prospects. A common sight in schools is that of small groups of children playing in the nearby open fields or under trees while teachers keep busy in leisurely amongst themselves or sit idly.

Teachers, in their relationship with Dalit children, tend to reproduce the discriminatory attitudes and practices in the school which underlie caste relations in society.

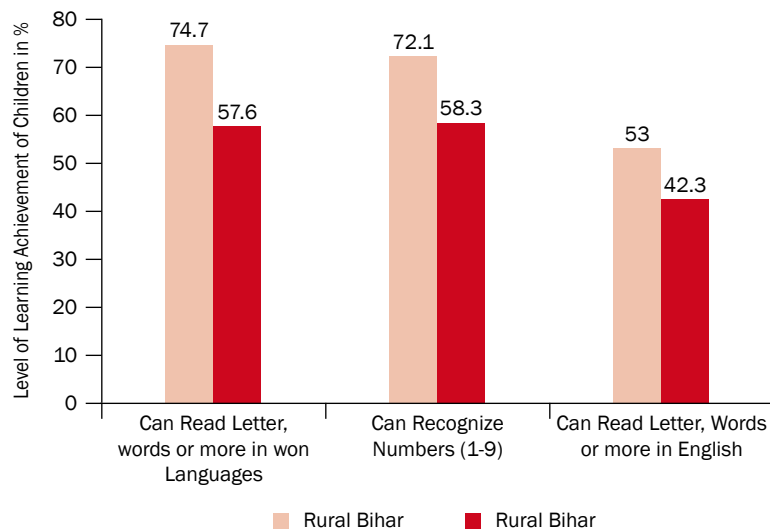
Children's daily experiences of the classroom and the school, of the teacher and the school environment are no longer the same as that of their parents.

Figure 1: The Vicious Circle of Exclusion of Children of Marginalized Communities from Schools



Even when a class is being taught, a few children from the same class will be playing outside. Teachers rarely make an effort to bring these children back into the classroom. This attitude has led to alarming consequences on those children’s learning motivation and achievement. For instance, the level of learning achievement of children in primary schools of rural Gaya where SCs and OBCs constitute over 80 per cent of the population is disturbing (Deshkal Society, 2006). This trend is made amply clear in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Comparative Level of Learning-Achievement of Children in Lower Primary Schools of Rural Gaya



Source: ASER Report, 2007, p. 95.

Although the situation prevailing in schools adversely affects the learning-motivation and achievement of children from all communities, it has a severely damaging impact on children from marginalized communities. To understand this differential impact it should be kept in mind that the majority of the children enrolled in the government schools in this area are from marginalized, particularly Dalit communities. For parents from non-marginalized communities the first choice is to enroll their children in private schools which have mushroomed even in rural areas. Most of the children from non-marginalized communities who enroll in government-run primary schools are those whose families are comparatively poor and who cannot afford to enroll their children in private schools. Second, the current teaching practices also require appropriate 'cultural capital' in the form of academic support and resources in the family in order for children to succeed in the school environment. Since the children from marginalized communities are mostly first-generation learners from very poor and illiterate wage-labour families, they cannot get academic support either from parents or from private tutors. For these children the classroom and the school, instead of home, have to be the main learning places. Thus, children from marginalized communities are doubly deprived of learning opportunities, both at home and at school.

In recent times, a section of policy makers as well as practitioners have started to challenge the dominant discourse of the concept of hereditary 'educability' and 'deficient child'. This has, to a certain extent, led to some change in the school life, the classroom as well as the relationship between the community and the school. These changes are instrumental in curriculum development and building teaching-learning materials from a child-based perspective. Legendary icons belonging to marginalized communities, such as Jyotiba Phule, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and Savitri Bai Phule have been given due importance in the teaching-learning materials at the national as well as the state level. In this context, the experience of Tamil Nadu in developing activity-based learning have led to some interesting outcomes in the field of relationships among students and teachers and participatory learning processes in primary schools.

However, despite these changes the continuance/discontinuance of the ideology of heredity-based educability can only be made after a keen evaluation of the processes and practices of pedagogy, mainly the daily practices in schools; the relationship between teachers and students; transactions in the lessons among the students; and, most importantly, space for children to voice their opinion and show initiative, both in their school as well as in their family. These aspects are often neglected by planners, policy makers and large sections of teachers. Even when acknowledged, few initiatives have been taken in the direction of developing a systematic strategy and long-term programme for

This indifference and lack of concern can be located and explained by the dominant belief among teachers of children's ascribed learning potential and hereditary 'educability'. Teachers articulate this concept through their belief in the notion of 'sanskara', which is considered a hereditary attribute transferred from parents to children, from generation to generation.

Since the children from marginalized communities are mostly first-generation learners from very poor and illiterate wage-labour families, they cannot get academic support either from parents or from private tutors. For these children the classroom and the school, instead of home, have to be the main learning places.

school reforms in order to make them both participatory and inclusive.

The present study locates itself in this context and develops a contextualized understanding of the processes behind the educational failure of children, especially of those from marginalized communities, in government-run primary schools. It does so by focusing on pedagogic practices, teaching-learning processes and the school ethos and environment. It focuses particularly on critically examining the role of the notion of heredity-based 'educability' in shaping and moulding classroom practices and processes of teaching and learning, and the teacher-student and teacher-community relationships.

Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted for the study. It describes the research objectives and approach of the study. The study was mainly based on qualitative data from the case study of two rural primary schools.

Objectives of the study

The research objectives of the study were:

- i) to document in further detail the classroom experiences of children from marginalized and non-marginalized communities;
- ii) to see whether the educational failure of children from marginalized and non-marginalized communities can be related to the ideology of heredity-based educability and specific processes in school that follow from that ideology;
- iii) to explore possibilities for changing school curriculum, interactions between learners and teachers, teacher beliefs, and self-concepts of children from marginalized and non-marginalized communities.

Selection of Schools for Case Study

Two government-run rural primary schools were selected for the study. The selection of the cases was based on four major criteria. First, the schools were selected on the basis of the social composition of the children enrolled as well as that of the village in which the schools were situated. In order to provide a comparative perspective, one of the two selected schools consisted of children from mainly marginalized communities, particularly, Dalits, lower castes and Musahars, and the school was situated in a village dominated by the Musahar community. The second school selected consisted of children from both marginalized and non-marginalized communities, and was located in an upper caste village.

Second was the selection of the district. Gaya has the highest percentage of SC population (33 per cent) in Bihar, and the Musahar community forms 60 per cent of the SC population of the district (Government of India, 2001b). Third, the learning achievement of children in lower primary schools in Gaya district is reported to be one

of the lowest in Bihar. Fourth, because Deshkal has been working in rural Gaya for the last several years under the auspices of the Dalit Resource Centre, it has been able to build a rapport with the local and district government officials as well as marginalized communities, primarily the Musahars, it was comparatively easy to gain official permission and access to schools for research purposes, which is particularly crucial for a study based on qualitative ethnographic data.



Enrolment of marginalised children has substantially increased

Based on these criteria, the two schools selected for the study were the Primary School, Badka Bandh and the Primary School, Majhauri. Both the schools were located in the Wazirganj block of Gaya district. While the school at Badka Bandh was located in a Musahar community village and all the children enrolled belonged to marginalized communities, the school at Majhauri was located in an upper caste Rajput village and the ratio of marginalized and non-marginalized children enrolled in the school was 80:20.

Methodology

The research study adopted an ethnographic approach to data generation through participatory processes of observation, interviews, discussions, focus group interviews and workshops. An ethnographic approach seemed best suited to extract the narratives of teachers, children and members of the community and develop a contextualized understanding of the ground reality.

A number of personal as well as group interviews and discussions were conducted with children, teachers, parents, Panchayat representatives and other members from both marginalized and non-marginalized communities. Ethnographic accounts of people's perceptions and experiences on issues such as retention, drop-out, performance and learning achievement, reasons for poor performance of children from marginalized communities, teaching practices, learning conditions, the role of parents and community, the role of village Panchayat and the Village Education Committee were generated and narratives were developed on their basis.

Observations in the classrooms and schools happened simultaneously with interviews and discussions. Observations focused on classroom transaction processes, teacher-student relationships and the school environment, and were conducted over a period of four weeks in each school. While schools were informed about the research and their consent taken, the researchers visited the schools without prior information to the headmaster and the teachers, so that they did not know in advance about the presence of researchers in the school on any particular day, and therefore did not make any specific arrangements to deal with the situation. This was done in order to ensure that the observations were made, as far as possible, in the normal setting of the schools. The length of time in each school also meant that it would have been impossible to produce a consistent 'show' for the researchers.

After review of literature and before commencing the field study, a two-day participatory workshop was organized in Gaya to explore the perceptions and experiences of multiple stakeholders in the education sector on the proposed objectives of this research. Thirty teachers from the two case study schools, fifteen teachers from other primary and upper primary schools located around the two case study schools, representatives of civil society organizations and Panchayati Raj Institutions, coordinators of Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs) and Block Resource Centres (BRCs) and representatives of the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) participated in the workshop. To ensure participatory character of the workshop, the researchers confined their role to being only facilitators. The researchers' role was mainly to present their opinions as resource persons on the issues of the workshop. The workshop thus facilitated discussion and sharing of experiences and perceptions on issues such as the quality of teaching and learning in schools; reasons for low performance and learning achievement of children particularly from marginalized communities; relationship between 'sanskara' and learning;

While ethnographic methods were adopted to gather the experiential and lived realities of the children, teachers and the communities, quantitative data was used to situate the particularities of narratives within the larger context of the village, locality, block and district.

and relationship between social identity and learning potential. The interaction helped identify and locate issues for further probing and analysis.

While ethnographic methods were adopted to gather the experiential and lived realities of the children, teachers and the communities, quantitative data was used to situate the particularities of narratives within the larger context of the village, locality, block and district. The sources of these quantitative data were mainly attendance registers and Bal Panjika of schools as well as data generated by the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) and the Bihar Education Project (BEP) through household and school surveys in the district and the state.

By focusing on the ethnographic account of the experiences and perceptions of children, teachers, parents and communities, and situating them in the socio-economic context of the village, locality and region, the study has sought to critically examine and analyse the pedagogic practices, classroom transaction processes of teaching and learning, teacher- student and teacher-community relationships, and the school ethos and environment, and understand and explain the impact of these school-based processes and practices on the educational experiences and outcomes of children from marginalized and non-marginalized communities.

The Changing Context

Curriculum Reforms and Teacher Development in Elementary Education in Bihar and India

This chapter discusses the issues and challenges of curriculum reforms and teacher development in the context of the rapid expansion of elementary education and increased access to schooling, especially, of children from marginalized communities. It discusses how these issues and challenges are dealt with by government policies and what initiatives have been taken to address them. The overview of the education policy suggests that though there is explicit recognition of the issues and challenges with regard to education of children from marginalized communities, and while a commitment to curricular reforms as well as reforms in the area of teacher education is expressed, there appears a lack of appropriate programmes to honour these commitments.

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Curricular Reforms

The National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF 2005) is the main policy document of the Government of India which contains the core guidelines and framework for school curriculum reforms. It proclaims that

rather than prescribe, this document seeks to enable teachers and administrators and other agencies involved in the design of syllabi and textbooks and examination reform make rational choices and decisions. It will also enable them to develop and implement innovative, locale-specific programmes. By contextualizing the challenges involved in curriculum renewal in contemporary social reality, this document draws attention to certain specific problems that demand an imaginative response (NCERT, 2005, p.3).

The NCF also notes the fact that learning has become a burden, causing immense stress to children and their parents, which are evidences of the deep distortion in

educational aims and quality. To correct this distortion, the NCF 2005 proposes five guiding principles for curriculum development:

- i) connecting knowledge to life outside school;
- ii) ensuring that learning shifts away from rote methods;
- iii) enriching the curriculum so that it goes beyond textbooks;
- iv) making examinations more flexible and integrating them with classroom life; and
- v) nurturing an overriding identity formed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country.

The NCF 2005 makes a series of observations and suggestions about pedagogy, curriculum, teaching-learning material, and classroom and school environment. It notes that

children's voices and experiences do not find expression in the classroom ... [T]he curriculum must enable children to find their voices, nurture their curiosity to do things, to ask questions and to pursue investigations, sharing and integrating their experiences with school knowledge—rather than their ability to reproduce textual knowledge.

The NCF 2005 thus recommends a child-centred pedagogy giving primacy to children's experiences, their voices, and their active participation. However, the curriculum framework also observes that

this perspective on the learner may sound 'obvious' but, in fact, many teachers, evaluators and textbook writers still lack the conviction that this can become a reality.

The document advocates the need to move from a single textbook to a package of contextual teaching-learning materials that relate with the child. The textbook as part of this package can be one of the tools to engage the child in learning. The teacher in classroom practices can use a variety of activities, concrete learning material, as well as textbooks. The document proposes that teachers be made active participants in the preparation of textbooks and other teaching-learning materials.

The social context of education, and problems and constraints faced by children from marginalized communities such as SCs and STs are also acknowledged to some extent in the NCF. The document notes in this regard:

A matter of serious concern is the persistence of stereotypes regarding children from marginalized groups, including SC and ST, who traditionally have not had access to schooling or learning. Some learners have been historically viewed as uneducable, less educable, slow to learn, and even scared of learning.

It also observes that many of the schools now have large numbers of first-generation learners whose parents cannot provide

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them direct support to schooling, and therefore, the pedagogy must be reoriented to meet their schooling needs.

Following the guidelines of the NCF 2005, the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Bihar, prepared the Bihar Curriculum Framework 2008 (SCERT 2008). The observations and recommendations of the BCF 2008 regarding curriculum development, teaching methods and teaching-learning materials are similar to those of NCF 2005, except a few minor variations such as a separate chapter devoted to curriculum for rural education. The document points out that urbanization is the lowest (10.47 per cent) in Bihar, and therefore, school education in the state should mainly be concerned with education of rural children (SCERT, 2008, p.71). Accordingly, the school curriculum for rural children should give special space to themes like agriculture. For instance, through examples from and discussion on agricultural and crop production activities, the curriculum can explain concepts in languages, mathematics and social sciences. Rural schools should also deal with greater detail issues related to Panchayats and rural development, while a comparison can be made between urban local governance structures and villages Panchayats (SCERT, 2008, p.77).

However, despite such observations and acknowledgements in policy documents, the flagship government programme for univerzalisation of elementary education, the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), does not have a systematic strategy or plan of action to address these issues and challenges. Instead, these issues are left to be addressed by the state governments through teacher training programmes which are discussed later.

Access to schooling

The national education policy's emphasis on acceleration of school enrolment and rapid expansion of infrastructure has led to a variety of educational intervention schemes such as the Education Guarantee Schemes (EGS) and Alternative Innovative Education Schemes (AIE). What is characteristic of such schemes is that they are based on community demand for schooling and local youth are employed as 'para teachers'. The overwhelming majority of children enrolled in the EGS or AIE centres belong to marginalized communities such as SCs, STs and OBCs. A major criticism against these schemes has been that of the quality of education actually provided. The quality of classroom transactions has been found to be poor in 'para' teacher schools. 'Para' teachers are found to lack the necessary training, professional development as well as ongoing academic support. 'Para' teacher schools are even found to lack appropriate physical infrastructure and a satisfactory school environment for carrying out effective and efficient teaching-learning (Nambissan, 2002, p.79).

In the context of the drive for rapid expansion of primary education, the curricular context has also been redesigned and minimum standards have been set which provide

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parameters for curricular development as well as evaluation of learning outcomes. Yet these are often so minimal as to not constitute a satisfactory benchmark for ensuring that adequate teaching and learning takes place in classrooms (Sayed et al., 2007). The retention policy at the primary stage has also been scrapped, and children are now compulsorily promoted to higher class regardless of attendance and performance. A compulsory promotion policy at the primary school stage prevents stagnation of children in particular classes, especially those who attend irregularly, and hence facilitates the achievement of the semblance of Universal Primary Education (UPE).

Building upon schemes such as EGS, AIE and other innovative approaches of the 1990s, an umbrella programme, the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) was launched by the Government of India in the year 2000. The SSA allows for a wide range of educational interventions that best meets the needs of diverse Indian groups within the educational arena. The programme focuses on quality and social change in education through promoting decentralized educational planning. The framework laid out by the SSA thus extends earlier trends by emphasizing the importance of community participation in securing universal education. However, for marginalized communities such as the SCs and STs, there is no analysis of what constrains their education. Like other policies and programmes, the focus is largely on facilitating community participation through mobilization of the disadvantaged groups in the planning process. In particular, community-based monitoring is emphasized and it is envisaged that task forces will be set up to monitor the participation of girls, SCs and STs. The policy document also emphasizes the importance of the educational development of these children, calling for a sharpening of resource targeting, providing hostels, incentives or special facilities as required, and setting up alternative schooling facilities in un-served habitations, amongst others.

According to the SSA, the school participation of the disadvantaged groups is constrained because of two reasons: the inability of these students to reach school due to infrastructure problems (distance from their hamlets), affordability (costs) and the location of schools in upper caste areas, and constraints on their active participation in schooling matters, particularly in terms of their ability to be effective social actors. The focus of the programme has thus been on enabling participation in schooling through facilitating entry and promoting community-based decision-making. Hence, measures such as no school fee, free textbooks and free uniform at primary the level, mid-day meal, scholarships, hostels, Village Education Committees (VECs) consisting of members from the village Panchayat and the community have been envisaged by the SSA. These enabling policies are expected to build a suitable environment for school participation of children from marginalized communities. However, there is no mention of curriculum, quality or non-discrimination in this programme framework with specific reference to marginalized communities such as the SCs and STs. The SSA does not make any

reference to the needs to transform curriculum and teaching practice in a way that addresses the modes through which caste or ethnicity-based discrimination and differentiation operates in the wider social context as well as in the school.

Teacher Education Reforms

Since 1990s, several alternative measures of teacher recruitment and training have been promoted which have been justified on economic and bureaucratic grounds, with little reference to the reality of the Indian classrooms (Position Paper of National Focus Group on Teacher Education for Curriculum Renewal, NCERT, 2007, p.6). Large-scale recruitment of para-teachers within the formal school system and an attitude of resignation towards pre-service programmes have become an integral part of State provisioning for elementary education. In many cases, as in Bihar, even the minimum qualification stipulated for recruitment of school teachers has been lowered to induct para-teachers. Such measures only serve to institutionalize the inequity of access to and quality of education and the worst sufferers will be the already educationally deprived children from marginalized communities who constitute the majority of students enrolled in government primary schools. As pointed out by the NCERT (2007), another important issue which is missing in the ongoing attempts at reforms in teacher education is efforts to make the content and method of teacher education curriculum more relevant to the contemporary problems of primary classrooms. The core of teacher training is skills related to performance of classroom transaction tasks, which include critical analysis of material, capacity to exploit analogies, interests and abilities, and so on. However, despite repeated reiterations on the need to strengthen the active 'agency' of the teacher in policy documents, teacher education programmes continue to train teachers to adjust to the needs of a system in which education is seen as the transmission of information and learning reproduced from textbooks.

The current teacher training programmes are organized around the institutional structure of DIETs, Block Resource Centres (BRCs) and Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs). DIETs are considered to be closer to the field, and therefore more alive to the problems and needs of actual classroom situations. They were in fact conceived as part of the strategy for addressing the need for teacher education in the context of rapidly expanding primary school education and the number of teachers required under the overall goal of UEE (Dyer, et al., 2004, p.13). The DIETs have a broad mandate to function in multiple areas—teaching, training, curriculum and materials development, research and extension, planning and management (Seshadri, 2002, pp.202-03). The CRCs are supposed to provide teachers a platform

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for regular monthly meetings and peer-generated teacher development activities. They are supervised by BRCs which are linked to district-level DIETs.

In Bihar, the CRCs emerged as part of the Bihar Education Project's (BEP) first phase (1991-97). Covering 12-15 primary schools or about 35-40 primary teachers, the CRC is envisaged as a space for learning through educational dialogue among peers. The main functions assigned to CRCs are capacity-building of teachers through provision of pedagogic support and academic counselling; providing a forum for sharing of experiences, enabling peer-group interaction and learning; development of location-specific teaching aids and instruction materials; and holding monthly trainings for cluster teachers (Government of Bihar, 2007, p.124). At present there are about 4,500 CRCs, i.e. 10-12 per block. Most of the CRCs are located in a middle school campus and the headmaster of the school acts as the convenor or coordinator of the CRC. A BRC for every 10-12 CRCs has been established. Currently 533 BRCs are functioning with more than half of them with their own buildings and campuses. Each BRC has the post of a full-time coordinator and three resource persons (one each from language, mathematics and environmental studies) seconded from primary and middle schools. The main functions assigned to BRCs include a ten-day in-service training programme for elementary teachers; holding of monthly meeting of CRC coordinators; guidance and technical support to CRCs; monthly visit to CRCs by resource persons of BRCs; and adoption of one school in each CRC by BRC for bringing desired improvements.

The current teacher training programmes being carried out through this institutional structure suffer from a top-down approach where programmes and models are designed at the state level by the SCERT or the BEP, and the DIETs and BRCs function as sites for the delivery of these programmes. Consequently, creativity, innovation, autonomy and field orientation are snatched away, and DIETs are reduced to acting as agents of the pre-determined programmes of the BEP. The BRCs also suffer from the same

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flaws as they are part of the same hierarchical structure. A cursory look at their assigned functions indicates that most of them are of a mechanical nature, not calling for any wider perspective or analytical work. The BRCs are not being called upon to enrich the in-service teachers' education programme with their own insight and inputs. Furthermore, the BRCs hardly have any autonomy in deciding about their own inputs in the training module. Ujala-1, the training module used by BRCs, is prepared by the SCERT, and the BRCs have to blindly use it for training of teachers. The non-academic character of the BRC is also evident from the practice of appointing the Block Education Extension Officers as BRC coordinators. It is not surprising that the in-service training provided by the BRCs does not seem to have any impact on teaching practices in actual classroom situations.

The two training modules being used for teacher training—the ten-day Ujala-1 module (Bihar Education Project Council, 2002a) for in-service training and the thirty-day Prerna module (Bihar Education Project Council, with UNICEF and Pratham, 2002b) used for initial training of newly appointed teachers—are very disappointing with regard to training teachers to deal with issues related to marginalized communities such as the SCs/STs and OBCs. For instance, in Ujala-1, only half a session is devoted to sensitizing teachers on issues faced by the disadvantaged children including SCs/STs, girls and children with disabilities (Bihar Education Project Council, 2002a, p.23). The ‘problems’ of the SC/ST children are grouped along with those of girls and disabled children. All are assumed to suffer from a ‘deficit’ model of educational capability. There is no political analysis of the reasons for continued disadvantage, and how these might differ among different groups. The example given in the module for discussion in fact does not refer to SC/ST children at all. It refers mainly to the status of ‘girl children’ and women. Likewise, the modules on child-centred and activity-based teaching-learning processes and on preparing contextual teaching-learning materials hardly seem to be capable of motivating teachers in learning the importance of these teaching methods. The seeming ineffectiveness of these training modules in having any impact on teaching methods and classroom practices and processes is amply evident from the findings of our study of two schools discussed in Chapter 3. The teachers in these schools have been exposed to these modules, but despite the training programmes teachers do not seem to have an understanding of the issues of marginality and social differentiation within the classroom, and differential learning needs and abilities of children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Instead, they seem to believe that children have ascribed learning abilities which depends on their hereditary ‘sanskara’. We saw that they also continue to practise the traditional teaching method based on rote learning, and transmission and reproduction of facts and information from textbooks. It is likely that the short length of the training means that the teachers themselves do not experience activity-based learning, and that their own learning to be a teacher is characterized by rote learning or transmission of ‘facts’ about children. Unless teachers themselves experience a critical, democratic pedagogy which forces reflection on both teaching and on the structure of society, they will prefer the comfort of teaching as they were taught (Davies et al., 2002 and 2005).

This chapter has argued that while the policy documents emphasize the need for decentralization and context-specific initiatives at the state and sub-state/district levels towards teachers training processes as well as preparation and development of textbooks and teaching-learning materials, local, context-specific initiatives have not yet emerged in any noticeable manner—at least in Bihar. A major lacuna in this regard seems to be that reform actions

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The rhetoric of 'connecting knowledge to life outside school' or of 'moving away from rote methods', as outlined in the national policy, is, it seems, not easily translatable into teacher learning and therefore teacher practice at the local level.

which are proposed to be carried out have been emanating from the centre, proposing pan-Indian standards and across the board solutions. Far from enabling local initiatives to emerge, these all-India plans and programmes seem to have created a dependency syndrome inhibiting independent initiative at the local, sub-district, district, or even at the state level. The rhetoric of 'connecting knowledge to life outside school' or of 'moving away from rote methods', as outlined in the national policy, is, it seems, not easily translatable into teacher learning and therefore teacher practice at the local level.

The Case Studies

Hereditary Educability as Hidden Curriculum

This chapter presents a discussion and analysis of the case study of two schools. It describes and discusses the socio-economic context of the children, the pupil composition of the schools, their enrolment features and drop-out patterns, and the facilities available at the schools. The teachers' belief in the notion of 'sanskara' and heredity-based educability, its relation with learning ability and achievement of children, and its role in shaping teachers' perception and construction of their relationship with children, parents and the community is discussed and analysed in this chapter. The formal classroom transaction processes and practices of teaching and learning are also discussed and their implications for learning experiences and achievement of children from diverse social backgrounds are analysed.

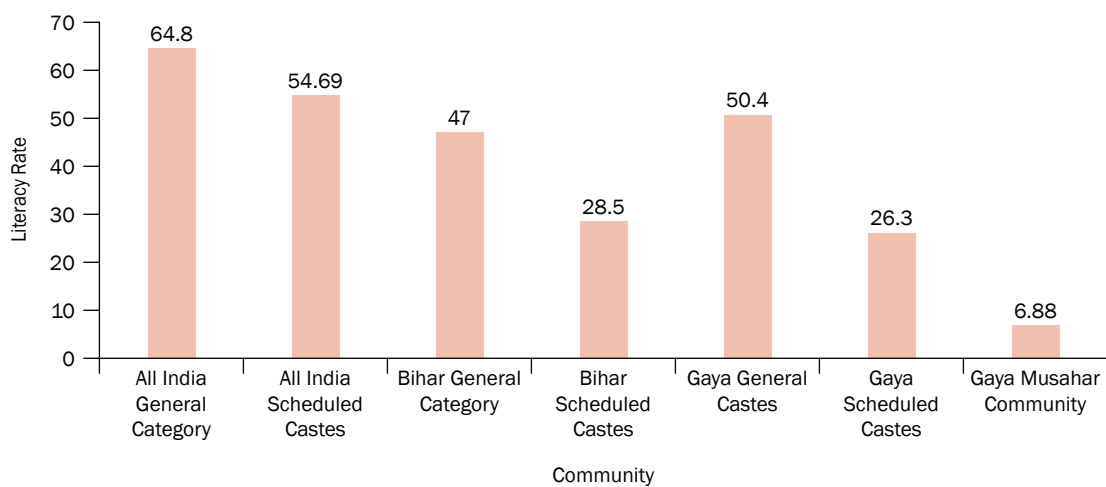
Socio-economic context of the schools

The two selected schools were the Primary School, Badka Bandh, and the Primary School, Majhauri, both situated in the Wazirganj block of Gaya district. While the school at Badka Bandh had seven teachers, there were four teachers in the school at Majhauri. All children enrolled in Badka Bandh belonged to marginalized communities while 79.53 per cent of the children at the Majhauri school belonged to the marginalized communities (Balpanjika, 2008). It is well-known that 'marginalized' and 'non-marginalized' are not homogenous social categories and in this sense, there exist social, cultural and economic differentiation within both communities. Therefore, if we assess the educational attainment levels across the communities and the school critically, we believe that understanding and appreciation of differentiation should be an integral part of our perspective. These differentiations are visible in the various indicators of education across the communities (Figure 1).

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Two major trends need discussion here. First, children from Dalit and Musahar community are basically first-generation learners. Most of their parents are illiterate while the parents (especially fathers) of children belonging to the non-marginalized communities have at least completed school education. If we look at the class background of parents, we find that parents from the marginalized communities are primarily engaged in

Figure 1: Comparative Literacy Rate



Source: Census of India, 2001, Bihar State Primary Census Abstract for Individual Scheduled Caste.



The labouring parents of the school children

agricultural labour, share cropping, marginal farming, and caste-based occupations. The livelihoods of non-marginalized communities are also based on agriculture, but due to small land holdings and low incomes from agriculture, parents are compelled to send their children to government-run schools.

The schools at Majhauili and Badka Bandh are respectively six kilometers and four kilometers from the Gaya-Nawada main road. The villages where these schools are situated are known in popular parlance as 'remote villages'.

Generally, the absence of minimum development in the village is a sign of remoteness, for example, absence of electricity, pucca road, post office, dependence on monsoon for agriculture and distance of 10-12 kilometers from the administrative office. However, the presence of primary schools, hand pumps for drinking water and motorized pumping sets owned by marginal farmers are signs of modern development in these villages. Other signs of development that are visible in the region are the stone crushers and small government-approved liquor shops. However, both schools, situated 500 meters away from the villages, are definite signs of development.

The primary school at Badka Bandh was constructed under the Bihar Education Project to fulfill the objective of locating schools in the habitations of the Musahar community. The immediate and effective result of locating the schools there has been visible in terms of a substantial increase in the enrolment of children belonging to the Musahar community. It is for this reason that when parents were asked why they themselves had not gone to school they responded that the nearest school was more than eight kilometers from their village.

The school in Majhauili village was established in 1978 by the Department of Education, Government of Bihar. Informal conversation with the villagers revealed that before the initiation of the Bihar Education Project, the vast majority of the children belonging to Hindu upper caste, especially Rajputs, used to be enrolled in the Government Primary School. But the profile of children enrolled in the school has changed substantially during the last 15 years, as more than one-third of students today belong to the Musahar and Dalit communities.



Inside the Classroom in Badka Bandh

The immediate and effective result of locating the schools there has been visible in terms of a substantial increase in the enrolment of children belonging to the Musahar community.



Country Liquor making unit housed in former Harijan School is very close to the primary school

Enrolment, Out-of-School Children, Drop-outs and Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Bal Panjika (Child Register), attendance register and the household survey conducted by BEEP are the key sources for learning about enrolment, out-of-school children, total child population, drop-out and pupil-teacher ratio in the schools. Attendance registers also provide information about the presence and absence of children on a day-to-day basis.

But, the profile of children enrolled in the school has substantially changed during the last 15 years, as now more than one-third of students belong to the Musahar and Dalit communities

Figures 2-10 drawn from the records shows the official enrolment statistics, out-of-school children and the social composition of the enrolled children in the primary schools of Majhauri, Badka Bandh and Gaya district.

If we compare the figures for out-of-school children, Majhauri village stands at 14.77 per cent as against the entire Gaya district's figure of 4.68 per cent. The percentage for out-of-school Dalit children in Majhauri is 4.93 per cent which is close to the district average. Children from Muslim families are in the most critical situation,

Figure 2: Out-of-School Children in Age Group 6-14 Years in Badka Bandh

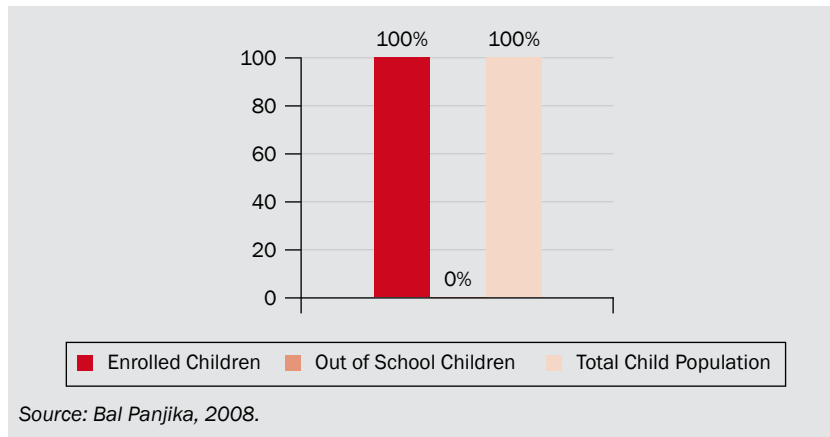


Figure 3: Social Background of the Enrolled Children in the Primary School, Badka Bandh

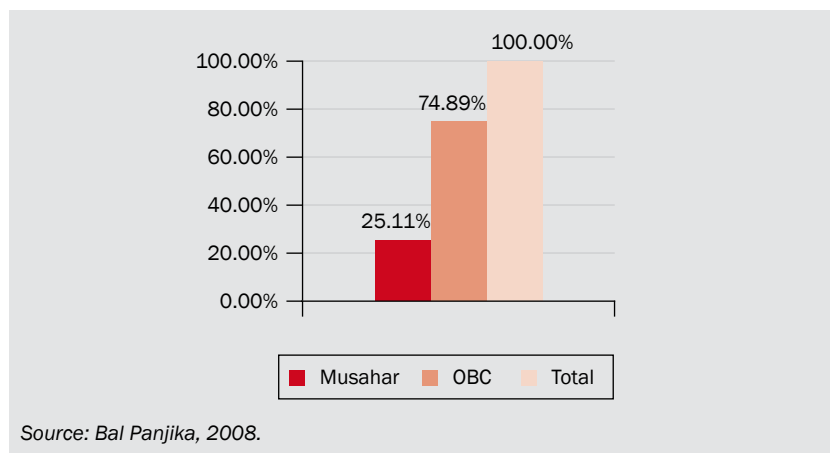


Figure 4: Enrolled Children in the Primary School, Badka Bandh by Gender

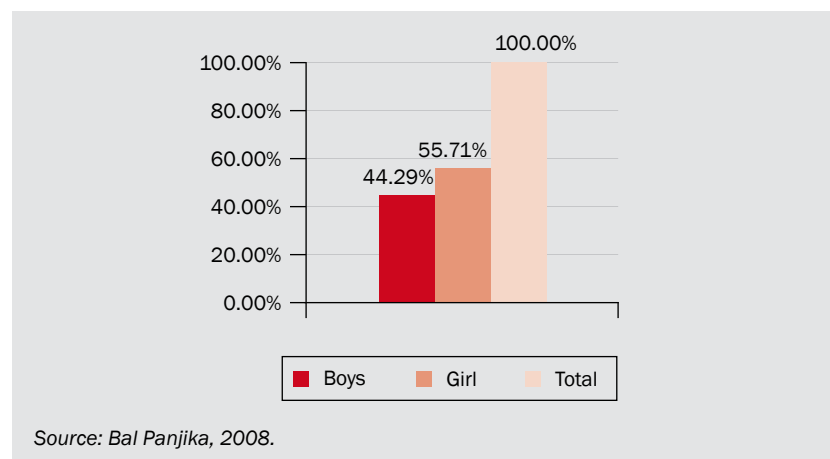


Figure 5: Out-of-School Children in the Age Group 6-14 Years in Majhauri

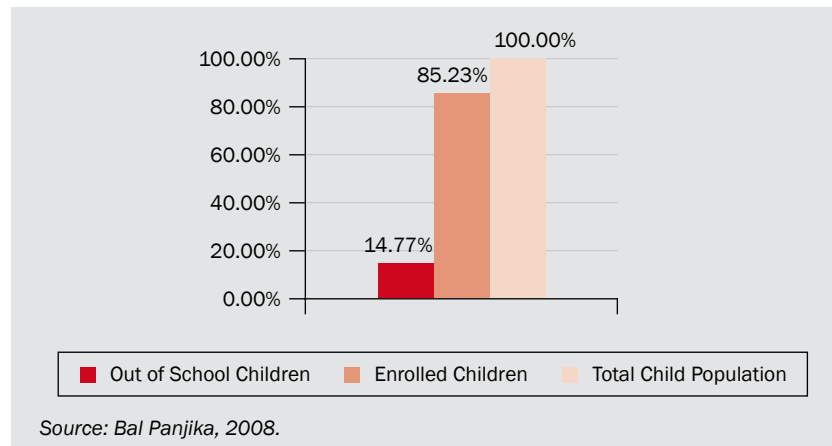


Figure 6: Social Background of Children Enrolled in Primary School, Majhauri

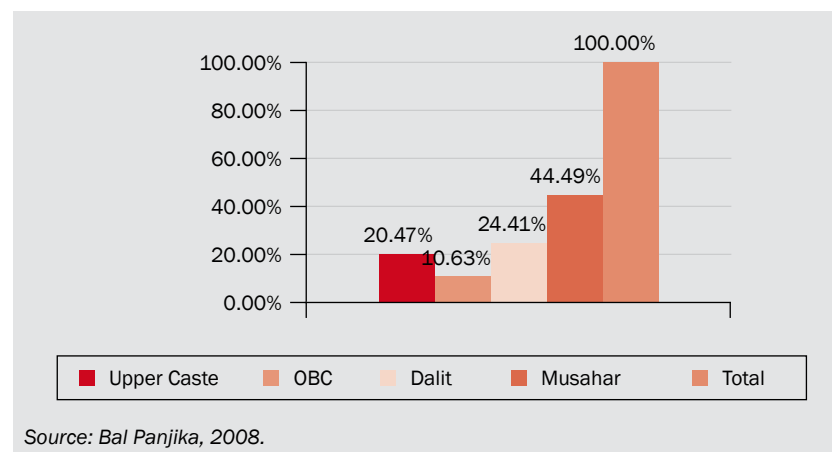


Figure 7: Enrollment of Children by Gender in Primary School, Majhauri

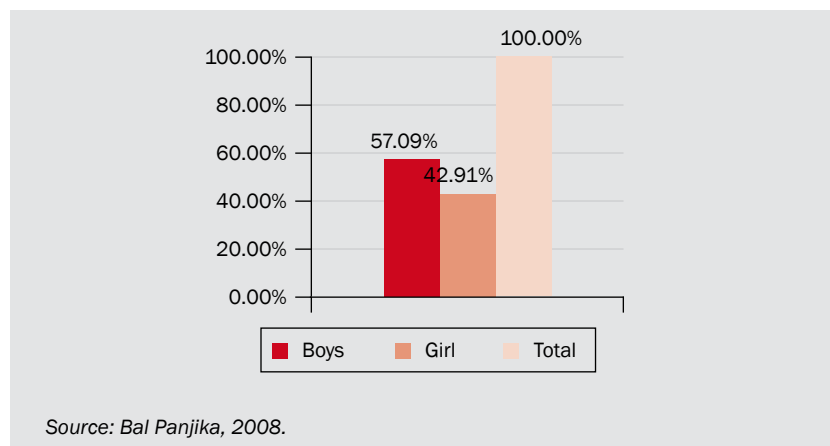


Figure 8: Enrollment and Out-of-School Children in Gaya District (6-14 Years)

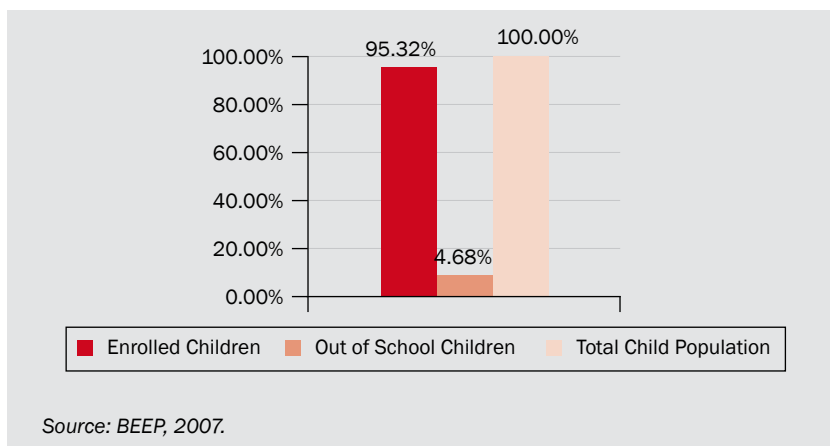


Figure 9: Social Composition of Children Enrolled in Schools in Gaya District (6-14 Years)

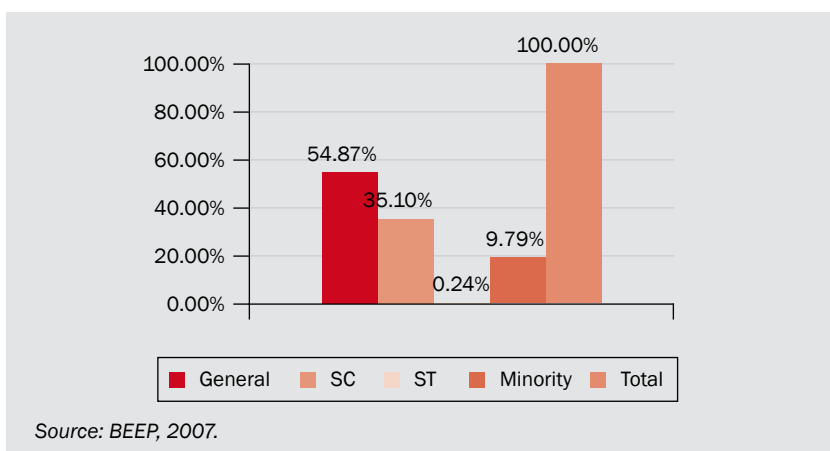
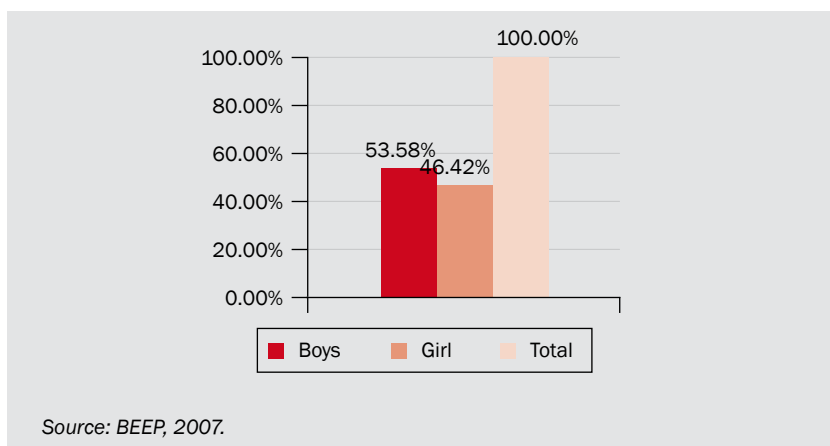


Figure 10: Enrolment of School Children in Gaya District (6-14 Years) by Gender



It is also notable that the increase in enrolment of girls is visible among Dalits and lower castes as well.

with 10.35 per cent being out of school across the district of Gaya. It is interesting to note that the Bal Panjika of Badka Bandh school does not show any child in the school-going age of 6-14 years belonging to the Dalits/SCs and OBCs as being out of school (Table 1). If these statistics are to be believed, it means that the child population in the school-going age of 6-14 years in the village is, technically, fully enrolled in the school register although all of them may not be attending school regularly.

Let us look at the social background of the enrolled children in the selected schools. Children of the Musahar community constitute 25 per cent of the students in the primary school of Badka Bandh, while the same figure in Majhauri is 44 per cent. The enrolment percentages in Gaya district as a whole stands at 54.87 per cent for upper castes and OBCs and 35.1 per cent for Dalit/SC children. This shows that more than one-third of enrolled children are from SC communities, and this is the reason that these schools in popular language are called 'Harijan' schools. During the study, we asked upper caste Rajput parents whose children were enrolled in the government school of Majhauri the reasons for their choice of school. There was consensus among the parents that they could not afford the fees charged by the private schools. We also found that parents who were economically better off were sending their children to so-called English-medium private schools in the nearby villages.

One significant fact that emerges is that the percentage of girls is less only by some points from that of boys. In fact there are more girls than boys enrolled at the Primary School, Badka Bandh.

To sum up so far, there has been a phenomenal increase in student enrolment in the recent years, especially enrolment of Dalit/SC and Musahar children. It is also notable that the increase in enrolment of girls is visible among Dalits and lower castes as well.

Let us now look at the figures for drop-outs in the selected schools. According to the Bal Panjika (child register) Majhauri has a drop-out rate of 12.99 per cent while the figure for Badka Bandh is 30 per cent—a significant difference between the two schools.

Conversely, the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) at Majhauri Primary School is 1:60 while at Badka Bandh it is 1:40. The PTR of these schools is close to the standard PTR of 1:40 that forms the basis for calculating the additional teacher requirement in the Annual Budget and Work Plan of the district and the state. Before 2007, the Majhauri school had

The appreciable change in PTR in the schools of Bihar that has taken place is due to the recruitment of a substantial number of teachers by the government during 2006-07.

a PTR of 1:70 while Primary School, Badka Bandh had a PTR of 1:250. Such differences could be found across all the primary schools of Gaya district. According to the records of the Bihar Elementary Education Project for the year 2008, there was a requirement of 1,759 additional teachers for the primary schools of Gaya district. The appreciable change in PTR in the schools of Bihar that has taken place is due to the recruitment of a substantial number of teachers by the government during 2006-07.



PTR has improved in recent past

It is interesting to note that during the field study when issues of enrolment, out-of-school and retention of children were discussed with parents, their assessments were completely different from the information derived from the school records. It was only on PTR where there was no divergence of opinion between the parents and teachers. While the school register at Badka Bandh showed all the children of the village were enrolled in the school, a section of parents from the Musahar community told us that their children were not enrolled in the school and they were not even aware that the school register showed their children as being students in the primary school. We also found many parents among the Musahars who were aware that their children were enrolled in school but who did not attend regularly. These parents were also angry that their children returned home after spending only half a day in the school.

These parents were also angry that their children returned home after spending only half a day in the school.

In the Majhauri school, children belong to both marginalized as well as non-marginalized communities. The upper-caste parents said that their children regularly attended school but that they did not find the minimum learning and reading achievements that they expected among their children. However, the response of a section of parents belonging to the marginalized communities, especially the Musahars, regarding their children's enrolment was similar to the response given by parents from these communities in Badka Bandh.

Interestingly, the responses of most of the teachers and headmasters of the schools (in informal conversations) were similar to those of parents in the two villages. When we

‘The attendance of the children in the school had increased with the implementation of the mid-day meal scheme. Unfortunately, since the last one year, the scheme has been discontinued. Therefore, only 30-40 per cent of the children are attending school since the last year.’

talked to the school headmaster in Badka Bandh on the substantial difference in official records and parents’ testimonies on enrolment, out-of-school children, and drop-out rates, he said:

Our officers want us to enroll all the children in the age group of 6-14 years. We want that children should attend school but it is the ‘sanskara’ of the parents that they do not inspire their children to attend the school regularly. One of the reasons is the fact that most children accompany their parents to work on the hills where they on an average get Rs.30-40 per day. The children who attend school are not interested in learning and they are not inspired by their parents. We should not forget that children stay in the school only for six hours and rest of the time they spend under the care of their family. In this sense, parents of the children are primarily responsible for attainment of learning and development of reading skills.

When we discussed the participation of children with reference to the mid-day meal scheme, the headmaster said:

The attendance of the children in the school had increased with the implementation of the mid-day meal scheme which in this region is popularly called ‘Khichri Baato Karyakaram’. If you come around the time when the mid-day meal is being distributed, you would have found double attendance than it is today. Unfortunately, since the last one year, the scheme has been discontinued. Therefore, only 30-40 per cent of the children are attending school since the last year.

Lack of Basic Facilities in Schools

Parents of the children were keen to share the difficulties that their children faced and the sufferings that they have to undergo due to the absence of even basic facilities in these schools. The hand pumps in these schools haven’t been repaired since the last six months, so there’s no drinking water. Parents believe the absence of drinking water in the schools is one of the major reasons for lack of attendance.

When we repeatedly asked for the child register, the headmaster of the primary school said a lady teacher had taken it home and that she was on leave. He was speaking the truth as the school does not have cabinet or a cupboard for keeping school records secure. Teachers generally keep the records at home bring them when needed, either for updating or when some officials are to visit the school.

These schools comprise of just two rooms with 3-4 chairs, broken doors and windows. When all the children of the five classes are present it is not possible to seat them in separate rooms. As a result, children belonging to two classes sit in one room. As the primary school has classes I through V, one class has to sit under a tree. Generally, both the teachers and the children are anxious for the school to end, and often the school closes at 1.00 p.m. instead of 3 p.m; children are interested in staying on in school only when mid-day meal is available.

Parents believe the absence of drinking water in the schools is one of the major reasons for lack of attendance.



Broken handpump in school at Majhauri

The infrastructure at the Majhauri school is relatively better than the school at Badka Bandh. There are cupboards and an almirah for keeping school records. Children have benches and teachers have adequate number of chairs. Interestingly, in the discussions on infrastructure and basic facilities in the school, neither the teachers nor the parents raised the issue of sanitation. This should be especially problematic since approximately 50 per cent of the children enrolled in the schools are girls. However, neither the parents nor the teachers seem sensitive to the needs of the students, especially the girls.

Interestingly, in the discussions on infrastructure and basic facilities in the school, neither the teachers nor the parents raised the issue of sanitation.

In this section, we have described the social context of the two case study schools, and discussed and analysed social differentiation within the classroom and access, enrolment and dropout of children from marginalized and non-marginalised communities. In the sections below, we discuss and analyse teachers' belief in the notion of 'sanskara', its implications for their perception and expectation of children's learning abilities and outcomes, and its role in determining the nature of relationship that they construct with children and parents from socially diverse communities. We also discuss the nature and quality of formal classroom practices and processes and its implications for children's learning motivation and achievement.



Inadequate Number of Classrooms for children in Badka Bandh



How long it would take for this toilet to complete for the School in Majhauri?



Inside the classroom in Majhauri

‘Sanskara’, hereditary educability and teacher-student relationship

Children learn a tremendous amount about others, themselves and the social system by observing the world around them. So much so that they learn about others in ways that the school might not intend by observing who does what or who is treated in what way. Besides the formal classroom transaction of teaching and learning, there is also a ‘hidden curriculum’ at work which can be defined as the ‘unrecognized and sometimes unintended knowledge, values, and beliefs that are part of the learning process in schools and classrooms’ (Horn, 2003, cited in Sleeter, 2005, p.10). This includes not what teachers plan, but rather what students learn, often unconsciously from their experiences in the school and the classroom. The teachers themselves are products of specific socio-economic and cultural contexts. They bring their own particular set of knowledge, social values, beliefs and attitudes into the school which determine the way they construct their perceptions of children (from marginalized and non-marginalized communities) and their relationships with them. Teachers’ construction of children’s ascribed learning potential has been acknowledged by education theorists as an essential part of understanding children’s educational experience. Referred to as ‘educability’, this is considered particularly useful in understanding the educational experiences of children from marginalized communities such as Dalits in government primary schools (Syed et al., 2007).

As hypothesized, the concept of innate or hereditary ‘educability’ of children is found to be working in schools through the belief among teachers in the notion of ‘sanskara’. When asked the reason for the failure of children from marginalized communities,

The concept of innate or hereditary ‘educability’ of children is found to be working in schools through the belief among teachers in the notion of ‘sanskara’. A common response was ‘how can these children study, they do not have ‘sanskara’.

particularly from the Musahar community, a majority of the teachers said that the ‘sanskara’ of these children and their parents was responsible for it. A common response was ‘How can these children study, they do not have “sanskara”’. As Rajendra Sharma, a primary school teacher in Wazirganj, put it:

Due to lack of ‘sanskara’, parents from the Musahar community are not disposed towards educating their children. They suffer from a pervasive sense of inferiority and wonder what they will gain by getting education. They do not understand the importance of education.

When asked to further explain how ‘sanskara’ plays a role in the education of these children, the teachers used various connotations such as lack of education among parents, poverty, home environment, lack of cleanliness, and so on to describe it. The following examples of responses are illustrative in this regard:

Children of Musahar community are not able to succeed in education because their parents are illiterate. Even when these parents want to give education to their children, they are not able to do so due to poverty. The ‘sanskara’ of these parents is such that instead of sending their children to school, they send them to work.

Nirmala Kumari , Teacher, Primary School, Badka Bandh.



Playground of the school in Majhauri

Due to the lack of 'sanskara', parents of the Musahar community do not take care to provide education to their children. Due to lack of education, unclean living habits and poverty, these parents themselves do not have 'sanskara' conducive to education.

Sanjay Kumar Sharma, Primary School, Barka Bandh

'Sanskara' is responsible for the educational failure of the children from the Musahar community because the parents' 'sanskara' gets reflected in the children also and children begin to view themselves in the image of their parents.

Neelam Kumari, Teacher, Primary School, Barka Bandh

The factors responsible for lack of education among children from the Musahar community are lack of 'sanskara', poverty and home environment.

Jamuna Jamadar, Primary School, Buddha Dhareya

These attitudes and beliefs are common not only among teachers from non-marginalized communities but even from marginalized communities. A Dalit teacher, Ramraj Manjhi said:

Due to their 'sanskara', parents from the marginalized communities do not take interest in their children's education. Due to poverty, they think that it is not necessary to educate their children. Their 'sanskara' is also reflected in this attitude. Lack of education among these parents is related to their 'sanskara' from the beginning.

What is noteworthy in the responses of the teachers while explaining the reasons for the educational failure of children from the marginalized communities is factors such as poverty, lack of education among parents and lack of a proper home environment. But instead of relating these factors directly to poor performance in school, the teachers relate these factors to the resultant 'sanskara' which is not conducive to education and learning, and then argue that lack of 'sanskara' is responsible for the failure of these children. We thus find ambiguity and duality in the teachers' responses. This duality is further manifested in the Bal Panjika (the children's register) which is the official record kept by the school about the number of children in the 6-14 years age group in the village. In the Bal Panjika of Majhauri Primary School, the only reason recorded by the school for the drop-out of children is poverty. Thus, teachers seem to maintain a duality between their response in the public and the private space. While in the Bal Panjika, which is a public record, teachers suggest poverty to be the reason behind children dropping out, in private they believe 'sanskara' to be the reason for the educational failure of children.

It is less problematic perhaps if 'sanskara' is taken to mean 'cultural' or 'social capital' related directly to socio-economic conditions. Then it can be argued that marginalized communities, due to their poverty and illiteracy do not have the requisite cultural capital for their children to succeed in the current schooling system. The belief in the notion of 'sanskara' becomes problematic when teachers begin to view it in terms of ascribed or hereditary attributes of communities. In the words

'The 'sanskara' of these parents is such that instead of sending their children to school, they send them to work.'



Not all children get school uniforms

of Sushila Prasad, a teacher at Majhauri school; “‘Sanskara’ is a hereditary disposition’. Another teacher Baikunth Prasad explained it as related to the ‘blood’, meaning ‘sanskara’ to be a genetic attribute. When questioned how the ‘sanskara’ is formed in a person, the teachers’ belief in its hereditary character became clearer. The responses from the teachers given below clearly indicate their beliefs.

Teachers seem to maintain a duality between their response in the public and the private space. While in the Bal Panjika, which is a public record, teachers suggest poverty to be the reason behind children dropping out, in private they believe ‘sanskara’ to be the reason for the educational failure of children.

A child’s ‘sanskara’ begins to be formed in the womb of his/her mother. After birth it is formed by parents’ ‘sanskara’, lifestyle and environment of his/her community and society.

Vinay Prasad, Teacher, Middle School, Pale

Children receive ‘sanskara’ from their parents. If the parents’ ‘sanskara’ is good, the children’s ‘sanskara’ will also be good. For example, if parents are educated, their children will also get education.

Mohammad Iliyas Ansari, Primary School, Buddha Dhareya

‘Sanskara’ is thus considered by many teachers to be a hereditary attribute which is transferred from parents to children from generation to generation. If parents have good ‘sanskara’ their children will also have good ‘sanskara’. Further, teachers related

good 'sanskara' with the learning ability and interest of children. A cyclical argument is presented in this regard, as indicated in the Introduction: 'good sanskara' comes from education and education is not possible without 'good sanskara'. Because parents from marginalized communities are illiterate, they do not have 'good sanskara'. As they themselves do not have 'good sanskara' they cannot inculcate the same in their children. Since these children do not have 'good sanskara' they cannot study and learn. Finally because 'sanskara' is hereditary these children are hereditarily 'uneducable'. Through these cyclical arguments, the teachers construct their perception of children from the marginalized communities as being 'learning deficient' or 'uneducable'. Yet though this view is dominant, it is not an uncontested perception. Some of the teachers, particularly from the marginalized communities, confidently reject this dominant perception and argue that school-based factors such as quality of teaching are responsible for the educational failure of these children. Parashuram Manjhi, a teacher from Likhampur, identified three factors in this regard: uninteresting teaching and learning; lack of professional skill among teachers; and fear-based teaching methods. Another teacher Vinay Kumar from Middle School, Mahnet, said:

Parents' 'sanskara' is not responsible for the failure of children from the Musahar community. It is found that children of parents without having the so-called 'sanskara' have become great scholars and thinkers. Poverty and related compulsions have kept these children away from education. Today everyone from the Musahar community also is aware that their children need to get education.

It is perhaps because of this growing awareness and assertion among the marginalized communities with regard to their children's education that teachers do not explicitly express their belief in the notion of heredity-based 'educability' in terms of caste. Rather, it is camouflaged with the help of cyclical arguments about the relationship between education and 'sanskara'. However, this camouflage is removed and the caste-based notion of purity and impurity underpinning the notion of 'sanskara' comes to the surface

'Sanskara' is thus considered by many teachers to be a hereditary attribute which is transferred from parents to children from generation to generation.



Children who are forced to work

Some of the teachers, particularly from the marginalized communities, confidently reject this dominant perception and argue that school-based factors such as quality of teaching are responsible for the educational failure of these children.

when teachers begin to relate ‘sanskara’ to the traditional occupations of the marginalized communities. For instance, a majority of teachers believe that pig-rearing is ‘polluting’ and a sign of ‘bad sanskara’, and the Musahar communities continue to rear pigs because of their ‘sanskara’. A few examples of such responses given below are quite revealing.

‘Sanskara’ of Musahars is such that they consider pig rearing to be good. Their ‘sanskara’ itself is such that they eat pig-meat. Musahars themselves are very unclean and therefore they do not consider pigs as polluting.

Manjeet Raj, Teacher, Primary School, Majhauri

Pigs eat filth. Wherever they go they make that place filthy. Due to pig rearing, children and parents of Musahar community can never develop good ‘sanskara’.

Lalani Bibhuti, Teacher, Primary School, Majhauri

Pig rearing has bad impact on lifestyle and thinking. It has a bad impact on ‘sanskara’ also. It is considered ‘polluting’ and is looked down upon.

Kiran Kumar, Teacher, Primary School, Majhauri

The Musahar community is considered ‘unclean’ by majority of the teachers; their occupation—pig rearing—is considered ‘polluting’; and the ‘unclean’ Musahar community is considered to be engaged in a ‘polluting’ occupation because it is their hereditary ‘sanskara’. There cannot be a better enunciation of the basic principles of ‘purity and pollution’ on which the caste system is based and whereby the traditional occupations of ‘pure’ higher castes are also ‘pure’ and that of the ‘impure’ lower castes are ‘impure’ (Dumont, 1971). Thus the basic principle underlying the notion of ‘sanskara’ is the same as that of the traditional caste system. In the caste system, the lower castes are considered ‘unfit’ for learning and education, because learning and education are considered ‘pure’ vocations. Similarly, teachers today believe that the Dalit and Musahar communities do not have a ‘sanskara’ conducive to learning and education. One teacher, Baikunth Prasad Singh from Primary School, Dhreya, even went on to explicitly state that ‘one cannot even dream of the mental development of those who are engaged in pig-rearing’. Thus, although caste is not directly referred to by the teachers while explaining the reasons behind the educational failure of children from marginalized communities, it is caste-based attitudes

The caste-based notion of purity and impurity underpinning the notion of ‘sanskara’ comes to the surface when teachers begin to relate ‘sanskara’ to the traditional occupations of the marginalized communities.

and perceptions on which their belief in the ‘sanskara’ is based. Caste has just been substituted by the notion of ‘sanskara’ to attribute the educational failure of the marginalized children to their inherent or heredity based ‘ineducability’. The teachers however are reluctant to directly discuss the caste factor. They assert that caste identity of the children does not matter in the school and every child is treated equally. However, this

assertion is belied by the fact that the Bal Panjika (children's register) maintained by the schools contain an information column which explicitly describes the caste identity of each child of the village. Thus, the matter of caste identity of the children in the school is an explicit one, and the official school records describe it openly, and regard it important enough to be stated.

The belief in the notion of 'sanskara' and inherent 'ineducability' of children from marginalized communities adversely affects the nature of teacher-student and teacher-community relationship as well as the overall school ethos and environment. In our survey of schools we found that teachers generally do not indulge in any overt acts of discrimination against children from marginalized communities. Such discriminatory behaviour as unnecessary and excessive beating/corporal punishment to marginalized community children, engaging them in performing such tasks as sweeping the school, seating them at the back of the classroom, which have been reported by studies in other areas, were not found to be practised in the schools we surveyed. Instead, teachers had developed an attitude of indifference and unconcern towards marginalized children's learning and education. This attitude however has a differential impact on children from marginalized and non-marginalized communities.

To understand this differential impact it should first be kept in mind that the majority of the children enrolled in these schools are from marginalized communities. As explained earlier, for parents from non-marginalized communities the first choice is to enroll their children in private schools which have mushroomed even in rural areas. Most of the children from non-marginalized communities who enroll in government-run primary schools are those whose families are comparatively poor and cannot afford to enroll their children in private schools. But the marginalized form the majority in government schools. Secondly, the current teaching methods are mainly based on home-support which requires requisite 'cultural capital' in the form of academic support and resources in the family in order for children to succeed in the school environment. Since the children from marginalized communities are mostly first-generation learners from very poor and illiterate wage-labour families, they cannot get academic support either from their parents or from private tutors. For these children the classroom and the school, instead of the home, have to be the main learning place. In such circumstances, the teachers' attitude of 'indifference and unconcern' has a severe impact on their learning prospects. A common sight often found in our survey schools was that of small groups of children playing in the nearby open fields or under trees while the teachers kept themselves busy chatting with their fellow teachers or sitting idly. Even when teaching is going on in a particular class, a few children from the same class can be seen playing outside. Teachers generally

'Due to pig rearing, children and parents of Musahar community can never develop good 'sanskara'.

The basic principle underlying the notion of 'sanskara' is the same as that of the traditional caste system. Teachers today believe that the Dalit and Musahar communities do not have a 'sanskara' conducive to learning and education.

'One cannot even dream of the mental development of those who are engaged in pig-rearing?'

The belief in the notion of 'sanskara' and inherent 'ineducability' of children from marginalized communities adversely affects the nature of teacher-student and teacher-community relationship as well as the overall school ethos and environment.

did not make any effort to bring these children back into the classroom. A high degree of apathy and indifference towards learning prevails in the schools.

Teacher-community relationship

The teachers' belief in the hereditary educability of children and their attitude of attributing the educational failure of children to their 'sanskara' has also resulted in an antagonistic relationship between teachers and parents, especially parents from marginalized communities. Parents from marginalized communities including the Musahar community openly blame the teachers for the failure of their children. They say the teachers have little interest in their children's learning and, therefore, do not make any effort to 'discipline' them during school hours and keep them within the school premises. Ironically, these parents even go to the extent of saying that teachers should physically beat children in order to inculcate 'discipline' among them. On the other hand, teachers say that if they do this, these same parents will violently oppose it.

Two examples are often cited by marginalized community parents to prove the insensitiveness and indifference of teachers towards their children:

- i) Absence of any drinking water facility within the school.
- ii) Non-functioning of the mid-day meal scheme.

As explained earlier, neither of the schools has drinking water facility. Children have to go out of the school, either to their home or to other parts of the village, to drink water. It often happens that when they go out for water they drift away and do not come back to the school. When parents see their children coming back home during school hours just to drink water or playing in other parts of the village or outside the village, they are enraged at the insensitiveness and indifference of the teachers towards children. They feel that if drinking water was available within the school premises children would not need to go out during school hours. Teachers blame the non-availability of drinking water in the school on the community. They say that if a hand pump is installed in the school it is stolen within a few days. They accuse the community for this. On the other

hand, parents blame the school, saying that there are enough government funds available with which a hand pump can easily be installed in the school. (There is provision of an annual school development fund of Rs. 2,000 for each school). But the teachers deliberately do not want to do this because they are not concerned whether children remain in school or go out of the school on the pretext of drinking water. If fewer children remain in school it also gives teachers, parents say, an

Teachers had developed an attitude of indifference and unconcern towards marginalized children's learning and education. This attitude however has a differential impact on children from marginalized and non-marginalized communities.

excuse for blaming the parents, especially those from marginalized communities, for not sending their children to school and being careless about their children's education (discussion with a group of Dalit and Musahar community parents).

The non-functioning of the mid-day meal scheme is another example cited by marginalized community parents to prove the school's indifference towards their children's education. Provision for mid-day meal in primary schools is one of the most prestigious schemes being implemented by the Government of India with a view to increasing enrolment, retention and learning achievement of children from poor and marginalized communities (Ramchandran, 2004). However, this scheme was not functioning in both the schools that we surveyed. When asked about it, the teachers expressed ambivalent opinions about the scheme. They were not ready to consider the fact that the scheme would facilitate school participation of poor and marginalized children and increase their retention and learning achievement. The teachers argue that the attendance of children goes up during the time the mid-day meal is distributed since children come to school for eating the meal and not for learning. The prejudice of the teachers towards these children becomes overtly evident when they sarcastically say that 'the hungry come to the school just to have a meal' (interview with headmaster of Majhauri school; see also Krishna, 2007).

The attitude of upper caste parents too complements the dominant view of the teachers. Upper-caste parents from Majhauri village say that due to the mid-day meal scheme, a majority of children and, to a large extent, even parents get the impression that the school is a place for getting free meals rather than a place of learning. To prove their point, they say that more than half the time available to teachers is wasted in implementing this scheme. Even children become involved in distributing and eating the meal. Upper-caste parents say that this scheme has even led to corrupt practices among teachers and administrators, and, therefore, it should be scrapped (interview with a group of Rajput parents in Majhauri village).

Parents from marginalized communities on the other hand hold two factors responsible for the non-functioning of the mid-day meal scheme (individual and group interviews with Dalit and Musahar community parents). First, the teachers do not have any concern for their children's learning and, therefore, they do not want to understand the importance of the mid-day meal in facilitating school participation and retention of children. The teachers enroll children from marginalized communities just to fulfill their official obligation and show in official records that children from marginalized communities are enrolled. They are not interested in whether these children come to the school regularly or not. Due to this attitude teachers do not take any interest in implementing the mid-day scheme. Instead, they view the scheme as a burden and an unnecessary 'trouble'.

They feel that if drinking water was available within the school premises children would not need to go out during school hours. The non-functioning of the mid-day meal scheme is another example cited by marginalized community parents to prove the school's indifference towards their children's education.

The prejudice of the teachers towards these children becomes overtly evident when they sarcastically say that 'the hungry come to the school just to have a meal'.

Second, the collusion between teachers and the local administration in order to make personal gains is another factor responsible for the non-functioning of the mid-day scheme. Dalit parents in Badka Bandh village said that the school purchased inferior quality rice for the mid-day meal scheme. For a few months, children were given meals cooked from this rice but even this had stopped eight months ago. The remaining rice was rotting away but the school was not doing anything about it. The Dalit parents had complained several times to the village mukhya (elected Panchayat head), but even he was not interested in taking any remedial measures. According to official provisions, the mukhya is also the chairperson of the Village Education Committee (VEC). Incidentally, the mukhya of Badka Bandh village was himself a Dalit. But according to Dalit parents, he was not interested in making any improvements in the school. As a Musahar community parent said, 'His (mukhya's) interests after being elected lie not in the betterment of his community but in the advancement of his personal political ambitions and monetary gains in collusion with upper-caste Rajputs'. Parents accused him also of colluding with the school to make money from the mid-day meal scheme. According to official provisions, the money for mid-day meals is deposited by the government in a bank. To withdraw the money from the bank, the cheque has to be signed by both the head of the school, who is the secretary of the VEC, and the mukhya who is the chairperson of the VEC. Parents say that the school withdraws the money meant for mid-day meals but does not provide meals to the children. This goes on with the collusion of the mukhya, the school headmaster and other teachers.

The discussion above indicates a deep sense of mistrust prevailing between the teachers and parents from marginalized communities. The teachers say that the children from marginalized communities do not come to school regularly and do not learn because their parents do not care about education. They say that their parents do not have good 'sanskara' and therefore do not understand the importance of education. They blame the educational failure of their children on their hereditary bad 'sanskara' which is not conducive to learning. To prove their point, the teachers say that although the Musahars were earlier bonded labourers, they were now free wage labourers and their wage-earnings have also increased considerably, mainly due to the availability of stone cutting work in the nearby hills. The daily wages for stone-cutting is around Rs. 200. If a Musahar husband and wife both work as stone-cutters they together earn around Rs.

The Dalit parents had complained several times to the village mukhya (elected Panchayat head), but even he was not interested in taking any remedial measures.

300-350 per day. Teachers point out that at this rate a Musahar family can earn more in a month than the teachers, who get about Rs. 4,000 as monthly salary. But despite higher earnings, the teachers say the Musahars do not take care of their children's education (personal and group interviews with teachers). 'Instead of buying books they buy alcohol' (interview with a teacher from Badka Bandh school). The Musahar men are said to spend an

average Rs. 20 per day on alcohol. Besides, due to the higher wages in stone-cutting, parents often make the children work so they can earn an additional Rs. 50-60 per day.

According to the teachers, the Musahars are habitual drinkers, and it is their 'sanskara' to drink alcohol. The teachers thus speak from an assumed high moral position and try to degrade the culture of Musahars by stereotyping them. They do not acknowledge the difficulties of the existential realities of the daily life of Musahars. They do not try to understand them in relation to the prevailing socio-economic context. It is true that the Musahars drink alcohol but it is also true that in the Musahar community, especially among their womenfolk, drinking is considered a 'problem' and not a natural part of their culture (interview with a group of Musahar women). The opening of a large number of locally made alcohol (kalai) shops in the area has immensely contributed to this. There are alcohol shops barely 200 meters from the Badka Bandh school. These shops are run with legal permit from the government and are often owned by locally influential persons. The government earns huge revenues from these shops. Nobody, including the school teachers, when talking about the drinking habits of Musahars raised objections or even mentioned the opening of alcohol shops near schools.

Furthermore, while the availability of stone-cutting work has increased the earnings of Musahars, it has also created health problems for them. The inhalation of stone-dust has led to widespread occurrence tuberculosis among the Musahars. The Musahar children involved in stone-cutting all show severe cases of malnutrition. It was reported that in a neighbouring village 6-7 persons have suffered from tuberculosis within the last year and 4-5 persons have already died in the last two years. A large part of the Musahars' earnings—as much as Rs. 10,000 the Musahars say—goes towards medical expenses. Many of them are compelled to take loans from local moneylenders on interest rates as high as 36-60 per cent annually. As one Musahar said, 'Wages have increased, but problems have also increased' (interview with Ramdash Manjhi, Badka Bandh village).

The unwillingness of the teachers to look at the existential realities of the marginalized communities and, instead, attributing the educational failure of their children to their 'sanskara' and inherent 'ineducability' has led to a deep sense of mutual ambivalence and mistrust between the teachers and the community. Parents from the marginalized communities, including Musahars, are highly aware of the importance of providing education to their children. The fact that a few OBC, Dalit and even Musahar community parents are found to have engaged private tutors for their children contradicts the view of the teachers. These parents are also clearly aware of the lack of concern of teachers towards their children, and that that is mainly responsible for their children's educational failure. In this regard, these parents point out the vast difference in the quality

'His (mukhya's) interests after being elected lie not in the betterment of his community but in the advancement of his personal political ambitions and monetary gains in collusion with upper-caste Rajputs.'

There are alcohol shops barely 200 meters from the Badka Bandh school.

The Musahar children involved in stone-cutting all show severe cases of malnutrition.

of teaching provided by private tutors and teachers in government schools. In this regard, a number of OBC, Dalit and Musahar community parents frequently gave the example of Shivrath Mochi, a Dalit who has been running a private coaching centre in the locality. They point out how private tutors give homework and check it everyday, how they help children complete their homework properly, and how they take care to meet the parents of children having problems in studies. Thus, parents from marginalized communities are clearly aware that the government schools are not performing their teaching-learning tasks properly, and feel the need to go elsewhere. The story of the Dalit private tutor (see box) Shivrath Mochi reveals how motivation and commitment and understanding of children's needs and constraints contributes towards enhancing the learning achievement of children as well as building a cordial relationship with the community.

Shivrath Mochi, the Dalit Tutor



Shivrathji coaching children in Badka Bandh

Shivrath Mochi runs a tuition centre about 500 meters from the primary school in village Badka Bandh, where children studying in Classes I-VI belonging to the Dalits, OBCs and Musahar community come for coaching in mathematics, English and social studies (hamara paryavaran). Children from Classes I to III have to pay Rs. 50 per month and rest of the children have to pay Rs.100 per month as tuition fee. Altogether, there are 100 children enrolled in the tuition centre.

Shivrath explained that the centre has been established for realizing three objectives. First, children who attend his tuition centre want to enhance their reading and learning capacity in English and mathematics. Second, children appearing for entrance examination for Navodaya Vidyalaya and Harijan Residential Schools seek better learning levels and standards. Third, there are children who seek better quality education and their parents wish to get additional help for them for strengthening the foundations in order to ensure that their children are not weak in any subject.

In the process of discussion, another question that emerged was whether children coming for tuition were not getting the minimum level of learning at government primary school, Badka Bandh. We wanted to know whether these children's needs were being met at the school, or whether the primary school had failed in realizing the purposes for which it had been set up.

Shivrath said that the primary school at Badka Bandh has failed in providing minimum level of quality education. Further, he said, 'If you happen to visit the school during school hours, you will find that many

children who are enrolled are actually spending time outside the school, and this number is more than the children who would be found in the school'. He emphasized that though new teachers had been recruited (there were seven teachers), they were still indifferent to the children and their learning needs. As a result, children were doing little to enhance their learning and were simply repeating the lessons as per the direction of the teachers. No homework was being given to the children and if at all any work was given it was limited to copying portions of texts for answering questions. To illustrate his point, Shivnath said that the mathematics knowledge of children in Class V who were not getting any learning support from the home/tuition centre was equivalent to the level of Class II children attending his tuition centre.

When asked about the teaching methods, Shivnath said that he first finds out the children's learning levels and then plans the tuition support strategy as per their capacity and needs. In this planning, he emphasizes on the need to rehearse more of English and mathematics. It is obvious that children in this process commit lots of mistakes. He says that children are affectionately helped to rectify their mistakes. Shivnath says that he gives homework and he talks to the parents of those children who do not complete their homework. He even suggests that the parents take some responsibility in assisting their children to complete their homework. Keen involvement in the children and their learning needs and his commitment to their education leads Shivnath to interact frequently with the parents. He says with a sense of pride that he is aware of the family background of all his children. If a child is not regular for classes, he requests the parents to ensure that their children are not absent from the centre. It is the result of such a close association and interaction with the parents that the 65-70 children enrolled in his centre attend classes regularly.

Parents in Badka Bandh village and nearby predominantly lower-caste populated village mention Shivnath's name with great respect and regard. This respect for Shivnath Mochi among the villagers is clearly demonstrated when they say, 'If Shivnathji had not been providing tuition in the village then our children would not have got even the minimum level of education.' It is for this reason that the villagers do not see Shivnath Mochi as a teacher but as a part of their family. It is because of this love and belonging to the village and commitment for the education of children that when 20 years ago, Shivnath came to the village and started the centre, the villagers gave him free land for building his house and the centre.

Shivnath has been living in the village for the last 20 years though his native village is situated in Barahchatti block. He decided to settle in Badka Bandh after resolving to dedicate his life for educating Dalit and lower-caste children. The inspiration for the decision came from personal pain. He shared the atrocities that he had suffered in school and college. In school, many upper-caste Rajputs objected to the son of a cobbler studying in the school. Absence of concern and positive attitude had led him to suffer negative emotions and mental agonies. 'Despite all this, I passed Class X and got admission in a college. I passed Intermediate and Graduation by dint of my hard work. But the upper-caste teachers remained indifferent to me. I had to look after three responsibilities while attending college—taking care of my parents, taking care of the expenditure, and looking after my studies for passing the examinations. I took care of all the responsibilities by providing tuition to children.'

Shivnath was deprived of a career in the government when upper-caste Rajput villagers did not give him his joining letter. 'All this suffering inspired me to contribute to the education of Dalit, lower-caste children, so I left my village 20 years ago to teach Dalit children in this village.'

The case of Shivnath Mochi shows how a teacher's orientation to the socio-economic context and constraints of the marginalized communities and his understanding of the needs and abilities of children from diverse backgrounds can help build an organic teacher-community relationship.

Classroom Teaching Transaction: Demotivating Learners

The classroom is the central place where the core of educational activity takes place through the formal transaction of teaching and learning, as well as the hidden curriculum mentioned earlier. The study therefore engaged in a number of classroom observations.

The school starts with establishing and asserting the preeminence and supreme authority of the teacher above all else.

In our study schools, the daily routine typically starts with the morning assembly and prayer. The prayer starts with the praise of the teacher, placing him on a pedestal above that of even gods like Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. Thus, the school starts with establishing and asserting the preeminence and supreme authority of the teacher above all else. After the morning prayer, the students move to their respective classrooms. When the teacher enters the classroom, the students stand up to welcome him/her. The teacher asks them to sit down and proceeds to read a portion of a lesson from some textbook or alternatively asks a student to read it aloud. When the task of leading this 'read-out' session is given to a student, the teacher may go out of the classroom and busy herself/himself in chatting with other teachers or may be just sit idly. In Classes I and II children can often be found incessantly chanting in loud chorus either the alphabets or mathematical tables. Such a loud chorus can be heard from a distance, and is considered a sign that the school is functioning and that the teachers are teaching and the students learning.

During this process the children remain passive spectators and listeners. There is little interaction between teachers and students. The latter are expected by the teachers to maintain absolute silence (apart from chanting). Any interjection or activity by a student is considered violation of class discipline and liable to punishment. In another variant of this process, the teacher/class monitor/another student reads out a sentence from the lesson which is repeated by the rest of the class in loud chorus. We saw no

A loud chorus can be heard from a distance, and is considered a sign that the school is functioning and that the teachers are teaching and the students learning.

effort by the teacher to try to explain the contents of the lessons, or relate it to examples from the socioeconomic context of the life-world of the students. A reading-out session is generally followed by a question-answer session. Either the teacher or a student reads out the question given at the end of the lesson and students are asked to provide answers. This process normally goes on for two or three days until the lesson is completed. At the end, the teacher asks the students to memorise the lesson at home.

The question-answer session further reinforces the centrality of the teacher and the text, as the following example from the observation notes illustrates. After a reading-out session on the lesson 'Halwaha Rajkumar', the question-answer session went on like this:

Sumit Kumar (student): What is produced from earth?

Sunil Kumar (student): Paddy, corn, and wheat.

Rakesh Kumar (student): No, gold.

The teacher interferes here in order to correct both the question and the answer according to the text. Although the question asked by Sumit Kumar was correct in itself, it is outrightly rejected by the teacher as wrong because it differs from the question given at the end of the lesson. Showing the textbook, she says that the correct question is 'When does earth produce gold?' Then she asks for the correct answer, in response to which a student reads out the answer from the textbook as 'when the son of a king holds the plough, then the earth produces gold.' The teacher promptly endorses it, and legitimizes the knowledge given in the textbook as the only knowledge worth knowing. Here though the question and the answer given by the students were correct in themselves, they were rejected as they did not match those given in the textbook. In the process, the centrality and supremacy of the teacher and textbook are established and reinforced. Instead of encouraging students' participation in the co-constructing of knowledge and building up on what students already know from their life experiences, their knowledge is delegitimized as not worth knowing, and their initiative and enthusiasm for learning through co-construction of knowledge is cut short. Often, attempts by students at interactive engagements during the teaching transaction are rejected by teachers as violation of the moral order, standard behaviour and discipline of the classroom.

One day a teacher was reading out the text of a lesson called 'Pashu-Pakshion ki Pathshala (School for Animals and Birds)': 'Although children of animals and birds do not have to go to schools like our children, it does not mean that they can escape (are spared) being taught during childhood.'

Student: 'Where do they study?'

Second student: 'On trees.'

Third student: 'Who teaches them?'

The entire student body started laughing at this question. The teacher too rejected the question with silence, as if the student had posed a serious challenge to the moral order of the classroom (see also Sarangpani, 2003). Through her silence and seriousness the teacher reestablished his/her supreme authority over the

'When the son of a king holds the plough, then the earth produces gold.'

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Rejection of the knowledge of these children gained from their everyday experience as irrelevant and derogatory remarks about their hereditary inability to understand and learn the 'standard' knowledge contained in textbooks adversely affects their perception of self-worth and alienates them from the learning process.

moral order of the classroom, and as the sole communicator of worthwhile knowledge in the classroom transaction process. The dominating attitude and opinion among teachers in this regard is represented by what a female teacher said during our interview with her: 'These children are all of low learning capability, and we (the teachers) have to make them learn the right things' (Sushila Prasad, teacher, Majhauri school). Implicit in this attitude is the view that what children already know from their everyday experience is not the right knowledge to learn in the context of formal education. This is further illustrated by the following example.

A teacher asked students in class IV to write about a village, as it was instructed to do so in the exercise given at the end of the lesson 'Halwaha Rajkumar'. Some of the students, particularly those from marginalized communities, wrote about the common features of their own village from their everyday experience, such as the crops grown in their village, how their parents work for other landowners; how if the paddy crops are not good, they are bound to starve; if a chamar (SC) touches the utensils belonging to other castes, the utensils have to be washed. These are everyday realities experienced by children in their social world. However, although the teacher himself is aware of these realities as he is part of the same social world, he not only rejected these responses from the students but also passed derogatory comments on the low mental ability and worth of these students. The teacher then gave instructions to students to strictly follow the content and language of the lesson in the textbook while describing the village, which is as follows:

Second person (telling the first person): 'This is really a wonderful place. The son of the king holds the plough, no one is a servant of anyone, all are brothers.'

First person: 'Well Prince! What is the difference between you and the other citizens?'

Balram (Prince): 'The only difference is that we have some more land and a few more cows.'

This image of the village presented in the lesson contradicts the reality of everyday life faced by children from marginalized and non-marginalized communities. It is difficult for children to relate to the imagined reality in the lesson where the son of a king tills the land with his own hands, and where all the people live like brothers. Children see every day that their landless parents have to work on the land of the landowners. They also see that people are divided into low and high castes and the low caste people work for the higher caste people. Rejection of the knowledge of these children gained from their everyday experience as irrelevant and derogatory remarks about their hereditary inability to understand and learn the 'standard' knowledge contained in textbooks adversely affects their perception of self-worth and alienates them from the learning process.

Contrarily when the children find familiarity between their life-world and the content of a lesson and are able to relate to them, they are found to be mentally and emotionally involved in the learning process. This was observed very clearly by the researchers during a read-out session in class IV in the Badka Bandh school. The lesson for the read-out was a story about a peasant, Jhuri, and his two bullocks Heera and Moti. As the children could relate to the content, they listened to the story with rapt attention, their facial expression changing with every turn in the story. However, due to the teacher- and text-centered transaction method, the students had no opportunity to engage in interactive discussion and develop critical thinking.

Any knowledge other than that from the textbook is considered irrelevant.

Thus, the current classroom transaction processes are characterized by traditional teaching practices whereby rote-learning of lessons from textbooks forms the basic learning activity. The teacher is the sole communicator in the classroom and there is no opportunity for two-way communication between the teachers and children. Any knowledge other than that from the textbook is considered irrelevant. There is no effort by the teachers to draw parallels between the content of the lessons and the local experiences from the everyday life of the children. When the children try to bring their own knowledge and experience into the classroom it is delegitimized as worthless knowledge. In the case of children from marginalized communities, their knowledge and experience is not just rejected; the rejection is accompanied by derogatory remarks on their hereditary learning ability. The textbooks are the only teaching-learning material used, and there is no effort to use supplementary teaching-learning materials which could provide examples from local socio-economic context and help children relate to the content of lessons from textbooks. The children from marginalized communities are mostly first-generation learners. Their exposure to the life-world outside their local socio-economic context is more limited compared to that of children from non-marginalized communities. Therefore, these children find it more difficult to relate to the contents of the textbooks which generally do not draw on the local socio-economic contexts. Furthermore, the current teaching practices require adequate home-support and, therefore, are geared to those children who already have the requisite 'cultural capital' in the form of academic support and resources at home that enable them to negotiate successfully in the current schooling environment. The teachers say that the children remain in the school for 5-6 hours only, and spend the remaining hours at home. Therefore, the home environment and parents' support are important for children's success in school. As first-generation learners from mostly poor wage-labour families, most children from marginalized communities lack such cultural capital. The current teaching practices based on home-support are, therefore, unfeasible for enhancing the school participation and learning achievement of these children.

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Conclusion

This chapter has described the changing social context of the classroom in the two case study schools as a result of increased access and enrolment of children from marginalized communities. It has demonstrated how teachers' belief in the notion of 'sanskara' and hereditary educability of children as well as the traditional pedagogic practices based on rote-learning and the centrality of the teacher and the textbook only adversely affect the learning motivation and achievement of children from all communities, and deprive them of meaningful school participation. Being first-generation school learners from poor and illiterate families, children from marginalized communities can be seen as 'victims of double deprivation', at home and at school. However, this would end up in engaging in the same sort of labeling as the teachers; the key point is the lack of recognition of the particular capital that children bring to school, and the varied experiences they have of survival, work and relationships.

A Summary of Findings

The study sought to develop a contextualized understanding of the processes behind the failure of children, especially children from marginalized communities, in government-run rural primary schools. It study focused on pedagogic practices, teaching-learning processes and the schools' ethos and environment. It focused particularly on critically examining the role of the notion of heredity-based 'educability' in shaping and moulding the classroom practices and processes of teaching and learning, and the teacher-student and teacher-community relationship. This chapter provides a description of the main findings that emerged from the study. The study reveals that significant positive changes have taken place in schools in recent years in terms of reduction in the number of out-of-school children from all communities, including Dalits, availability of a primary school within one kilometre of every rural habitation and improvement in teacher-pupil ratio, but the nature and quality of teaching-learning practices and processes, teacher-student relationships, teacher-community relationships, and their adverse impact on the educational experience and outcomes of children remain issues of serious concern.

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The Findings

Teachers' belief in hereditary educability and their negative perception of children from marginalized communities

The study reveals that a majority of school teachers in the study believe in the concept of heredity-based 'educability' of children. This concept is articulated by teachers through their belief in the notion of 'sanskara' which is considered a hereditary attribute transferred from parents to children, from generation to generation. Teachers believe that a child's learning potential and ability depends on his/her 'sanskara'. A child with 'good sanskara' will be able to learn and get educated easily. 'Good sanskara' comes from education, and because parents from marginalized communities are illiterate, they are seen not to have good 'sanskara'. As they themselves do not have 'good sanskara' their children too cannot

Based on their notion of hereditary 'sanskara' teachers have developed their perception of children from marginalized communities as being 'learning deficient' or 'uneducable'.

have 'good sanskara' since 'sanskara' is hereditary. Finally, because these children cannot have 'good sanskara', they cannot have any learning potential and ability.

A cyclical argument is thus presented by the teachers to justify their belief in the notion of hereditary 'educability' of children. Although the caste factor is not directly referred to, teachers' explanations of hereditary 'sanskara' clearly reveals the caste underpinnings behind this notion. Based on their notion of hereditary 'sanskara' teachers have developed their perception of children from marginalized communities as being 'learning deficient' or 'uneducable'. They thus have very low or no expectations of learning achievement from these children. The teachers' attitude of what we termed 'indifference and unconcern' has a severely damaging impact on children's learning prospects.

Teacher and text-centred pedagogy dominated by rote learning

The emphasis is on reproduction of textual knowledge without comprehending and understanding its meaning.

The classroom transaction processes of teaching and learning are characterized by the centrality of the teacher and the textbook whereby rote learning and memorization form the basic learning methods. Teaching means transmission of facts and knowledge contained in the textbooks. The emphasis is on reproduction of textual knowledge without comprehending and understanding its meaning. Any knowledge other than that from textbooks is considered irrelevant. It is also important to note that there is no effort to use any supplementary teaching-learning materials to provide examples from the local socio-economic context, or to draw parallels between the content of textbook lessons and the experiences from everyday life of children which could help them to relate to the content. Children's voices, experiences and knowledge are not respected and are rejected as irrelevant and worthless. In the case of children from marginalized communities this is coupled with derogatory remarks on their learning ability and worth. The whole teaching-learning process is an alienating and demotivating experience for such children.

As first generation learners from very poor illiterate wage labour families, children from marginalized communities lack such home support to enable them to navigate the learning process.

Home-support based teaching-learning unfeasible for marginalized community children

The current teaching methods are also based on the assumption that children will get adequate academic support from home for developing reading and writing skills. But as first generation learners from very poor illiterate wage labour families, children from marginalized communities lack such home support to enable them to navigate the learning process. Thus, children from

marginalized communities suffer from cumulative deprivation in the current schooling system, first, due to teachers' indifferent attitude towards them; second, due to alienating and demotivating teaching and learning processes; and third, due to lack of requisite home support and cultural capital that is necessary to enable them to succeed in the current schooling system.

Teachers' lack of understanding of social differentiation within the classroom and the learning needs and abilities of marginalized community children

The teaching practices are also characterized by a perspective that does not take into account the social context of the classroom. Teachers appear to have little understanding of marginality and its socio-historical context. They do not recognize the reality of socio-economic differentiation and diversity within the classroom. Teachers say, with the confidence of presenting themselves as being non-discriminating and progressive, that they treat children equally. This is different from valuing each child equally. In a situation where there is social differentiation among children, treating each child equally would mean not recognizing, and not being sensitive to, the differential learning needs and abilities of children. In such a perspective, teachers view their accountability in terms of transmission of content, without any concern for the resulting learning achievement of children, nor skill to deal with differentiation. There is a critical need to work with teachers' attitudes and orientations towards children for socially diverse communities.

They do not recognize the reality of socio-economic differentiation and diversity within the classroom.

Mistrust between school and marginalized communities

The lack of a perspective that understands and values social differentiation and diversity within the classroom has also led to an antagonistic relationship between the school and the communities, particularly the marginalized communities. Instead of being aware of, and able to address, the difficulties and challenges that children from such communities may face in their schooling experience due to their socio-economic and historical contexts, as explained above, the schools try to blame the education failure of those children on the hereditary 'sanskara' of their parents and communities. The parents, on the other hand, are highly aware of the fact that it is the quality of teaching in schools which is responsible for the education failure of their children. They blame teachers and the school for their indifference towards the achievement of their children. They are also angry that their complaints in this regard to the school and the village Panchayat representatives are not taken care of. The current govt. provision for empowering the local communities, especially the marginalized communities, and involving them actively in planning and

The marginalized communities feel powerless within the local power structures and relations and are unable to become active participants in school affairs.

management of schools through the VECs, is found to be largely ineffective here. The marginalized communities feel powerless within the local power structures and relations and are unable to become active participants in school affairs. In a socio-economic context where marginalized communities are struggling to just survive, it should be the responsibility of the school to take the initiative to develop an organic relationship with the communities.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The research study findings indicate an urgent and critical need for school reforms, particularly in the areas of teaching and learning methods; classroom transactions, practices and processes; teaching-learning materials; and teacher development. In the light of the findings of the study, the Deshkal Society proposes the following possible steps for school improvement with the aim of increasing retention and enhancing learning achievement of children, especially of children from marginalized communities.

- a. **Child-centred activity-based learning:** The current teaching and learning method based on rote learning, memorization, copying and repetition of lessons from textbooks needs to be replaced with a child-centred, joyful learning method, based on the concept of Activity-based learning, needs to be initiated. In this context the ongoing experiments of activity-based learning such as in Tamil Nadu can be built up. Such a pedagogic approach gives primacy to children's participation, their experiences and voices in the learning process. It allows children to engage in group learning, peer learning and self-motivated learning. Activity-based learning is an aid to increase the pace of learning, and enhance the learning capacity and achievement of children. The learning tools and materials chosen should be contextual and should be locally available so the teachers have the flexibility to adapt them.

The programme therefore intends to work with teachers in selected schools to explain activity-based methods, identify the barriers to their introduction and develop incentives to experiment with such strategies. The workshops in schools would model activity-based methods, with teachers participating in group and peer learning for identifying learning difficulties.

- b. **Contextual teaching-learning materials:** There is a need to develop contextual teaching-learning materials which relate to children's world and their socio-economic context and environment. The current classroom transaction processes are dominated by 'teaching the textbook'. These textbooks are largely based on the socio-cultural frame of references of the urban middle class and dominant castes. Children from marginalized communities do not find any familiarity between the contexts of the textbooks and their own life-world and experiences, and therefore, are unable to relate to them. There is often little effort on the part of teachers to draw parallels

or give examples from local socio-economic contexts while teaching the texts. This whole process demotivates children and alienates them from the learning process. There is therefore a need for teaching-learning materials that are contextual to children's life-worlds and experiences, and that can be used to engage them in active learning. At an early stage, for example in classes I and II, it may contain locally available concrete objects to help teach concepts like shapes, counting objects, charts and cards to illustrate and play with, and so on. At a later stage, it can gradually take the form of textual presentations of issues from local socio-economic contexts. The preparation of teaching-learning materials should be process-based and not be a one-off product-based strategy. A bottom-up approach should be followed whereby teachers themselves are actively involved in the preparation of teaching-learning materials. Together with activity-based methods, the programme will work with teachers in selected schools to develop materials and trial their use with the students.

- c). **Learning support centres:** The current teaching methods are geared to those children who have requisite 'cultural capital' in the form of academic support and resources at home that enable them to perform successfully in the existing schooling system. Homework forms an important part of the learning process in this system of schooling. But this system does not enhance the school participation and learning achievement of children from marginalized communities. Ideally, the school has to become the central place of learning for these children, with a need to move away from homework-based learning to school-based learning. The activity-based learning method and the contextual teaching-learning materials will be important initiatives through which schools can be converted into central places of learning. However, even then, children from marginalized communities might need extra learning support, at least initially, in order to enable them to cope with the learning processes. This support can be provided to them by establishing learning centers which can act as proxies for their home support. These centres can provide them learning support for two hours in the evening and can be run with the active involvement of the local communities in their planning and management.
- d). **Contextual teacher education and development:** The study indicates a need for teacher education and development at three levels. First, there is a need to orient teachers to the methods of activity-based learning, develop their professional skills and motivate them to make it a part of their teaching practices and processes. Second, there is a need to work with teachers on their attitude and teaching perspective, and develop a critical and constructive outlook among them on issues of marginality and its socio-economic and historical context—including developing relevant teaching materials. Third, teachers also need to be oriented towards building a cordial and organic relationship between the school and communities by promoting active involvement of communities in the planning and management of school affairs.

From working in selected schools, the programme can move towards a broader in-service programme bringing together teachers from a number of schools. This teacher education programme needs to work consistently and its sustainability should be ensured. The programme should have an in-built mechanism to ensure active participation of teachers as key actors at every stage of its planning, development and implementation. After the programme is successful in its achievements, efforts can be made to link it up with the existing training programmes of the government.

- e). **Toolkit for teacher education on marginality and diversity:** The study indicates the need to develop a toolkit for teachers based on the core theme of marginality and diversity. The toolkit should focus on developing among teachers a primary understanding of the key concepts of marginality and diversity, and how this understanding can be implemented in classroom practices and processes.

At present, most teachers believe in the ascribed learning ability of children based on their hereditary 'sanskara'. Based on this belief, teachers perceive children from marginalized communities as being 'learning deficient' or 'uneducable'. As a result, they have very low or no expectation of learning achievement from these children. Teachers need to appreciate and value the existing reality of social context and differentiation in the classroom, and be sensitive to the differential needs, abilities and interests of the socially diverse children.

The toolkit will help in sustaining the impact of the training programme for capacity building of school teachers by serving as a constant companion to them in the form of a practical handbook for stimulating, engaging in and practicing child-centered, democratized, participatory and inclusive teaching and learning. The toolkit can also become a part of the source material for training of school teachers under DIET and BRC. It can also be used for school supervisors, again to ensure sustainability.

- f). **Process documentation and further action research:** All the above programmes can take the shape of action research, whereby Deshkal will be trialing school-based initiatives and the toolkit, and will engage in its own reflection, together with partners. The dynamic process of implementation of various activities of the school improvement programme would need to be consistently documented in order to ensure constant monitoring, evaluation and improvement, and to derive inputs and lessons for future action research.

The strengthening of the ongoing school-based programmes of the government such as the mid-day meal scheme, the Village Education Committee, and the provisioning of basic infrastructural facilities can also be an integral part of the activities during the course of implementation of the above proposed steps.

Notes

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- i The origin of Musahars—the community known by different names in Bihar and its adjoining states—remains debatable. In colonial ethnographic works they have been related to different tribes both within and outside the region based on etymological explanation and anthropometrical indices. While Nesfield (1888) linked their origin to the Kol and Cheru tribes of Chotanagpur based on the legendary myths of ‘Deosi’, Risley’s (1891) hypothesis based on the etymological explanation of the word Musahar (rat-eater or rat-catcher) traces their origin to the equally Dravidian Bhuiyas of southern Chotanagpur. Meanwhile Indian ethnologist S.C. Ray (1935a, 1935b) links their origin to the independent section of the old ‘Desh Bhuiyas’ or ‘Pauri Bhuiyas’ in the tributary state of Orissa. For detailed discussion on this, see Gyan Prakash (1990), *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labour Servitude in Colonial India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
 - ii In traditional Hindu society the various life-cycle rites and rituals were called ‘sanskara’ – ‘naamkaran sanskara’ (naming a child), ‘vivaha sanskara’ (marriage), ‘yagyopavita sanskara’ (sacred thread ceremony), ‘daha sanskara’ (death ceremony), etc. Each caste group in the hierarchical structure of the Hindu social order had a specific set of ‘sanskara’. Castes placed higher in the hierarchy were considered purer and their ‘sanskara’ was also considered purer and higher in status. The lower castes did not have the right to adopt and perform the ‘sanskara’ of the higher castes. As the caste system was based on birth, a person’s right to a particular ‘sanskara’ depended on the fact of his birth in a particular caste. In recent times, the term ‘sanskara’ is used by common people to describe the socio-cultural attributes of a person which he/she has inherited by being a member of a particular caste. Caste is based on birth and a person cannot change his caste. Therefore, a person’s ‘sanskara’ is also considered to be based on his birth in a particular caste and cannot be changed. ‘Sanskara’ of children from lower castes is considered to be of low status and a hindrance to learning.
 - iii The term Scheduled Caste is used to denote (in the legal sense) former untouchable castes based on a schedule promulgated by the British in 1936. It is a list of castes entitled to special education benefit, parliamentary seats and public employment. (Yusuf Syed et al., ‘Education Exclusion and Inclusion: Policy and Implementation in South Africa and India’, 2007, p. VI).
 - iv The Central Government of India classifies some of its citizens based on their social and economic condition as Other Backward Class (OBC). The constitution describes OBCs as ‘socially and educationally backward classes’, and the government is enjoined to ensure their social and educational development. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Other_Backward_Class).

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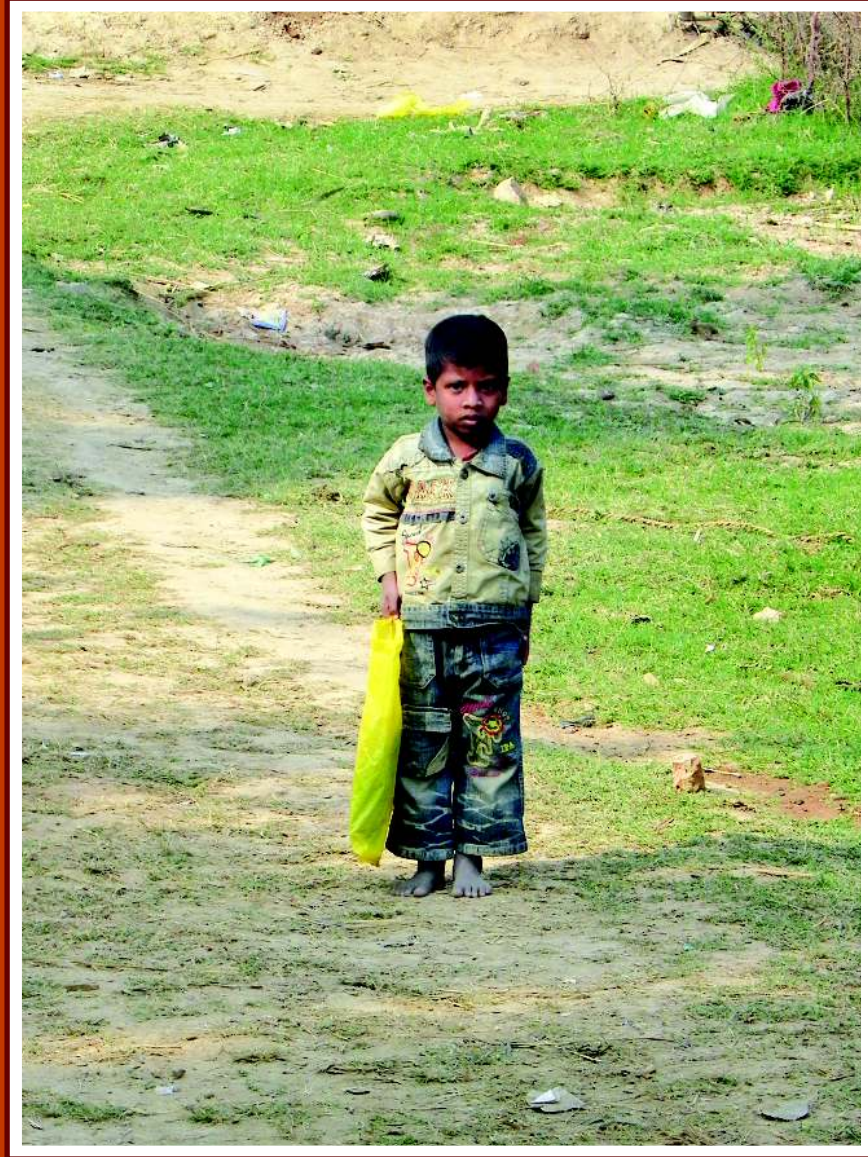
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