DISPARITIES IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOL: A STUDY ON PRIMARY EDUCATION IN PASCHIM MEDINIPUR DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL

Chandrani Das
Research scholar, Vidyasagar University

Professor Purnendu Sekhar Das (Rtd.)
Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur

Dr. Asis Kumar Dandapat
Principal, Hijli College, Kharagpur

ABSTRACT

Education not only helps to overcome the inequalities between the castes, or gender or ethnic groups, but also has the potential to remove the inequalities within them. In this backdrop, the study took up a comparative analysis on the different aspects of schooling in the two type's management of primary schools (one Govt.-aided school and another private school in West Bengal).

Keywords: Disparities, Primary Education, Multidimensional.

1.1 Background

India has made significant progress in increasing enrolment and school completion over the past decades (Kingdon, 2007). Enrolment in primary schools has increased from 19.2 million in 1950-51 to 137.1 million in 2011-12. Gross primary school enrolment is nearing 100%. Overall enrolment of children in all stages of education in India has improved over the years. Such increase in school participation has been also associated with a significant jump in the literacy rate which rose from 18% in 1951 to 65% in 2001 (Dougherty and Herd, 2008) and 72.99% in 2011.

On the one hand, the growth in enrolment has taken place in the backdrop of introduction of various centrally sponsored educational interventions. Examples of such schemes include Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Non-formal Education Program (1979-90), Operation Blackboard for small rural schools (1986), Total Literacy Campaigns (1988), District Primary School Education Program (1994-2002) and more recently the mid-day meal schemes. Between 1950 and 1990, the number of schools increased more than three-fold, outpacing the growth of the school age population. School participation may have responded to these supply-side changes.
On the other hand, the growth in school participation has coincided with the era of economic reform and liberalization which also saw high rates of economic growth by historical standards. Between 1983 and 2004, rural poverty declined from 46.9% to 28.4%, at a rate of one percentage point a year (Lanjouw and Murgai, 2009). Economic growth may have enabled previously poorer families to enroll children in school thereby reducing inequalities in educational opportunities. Indeed the post-reform era of the nineties has been a period of fairly rapid increase in literacy and school participation (Dougherty and Herd, 2008).

Nonetheless, substantial gaps remain in educational outcomes across gender, caste, religion and between urban and rural inhabitants (Wu, Goldschmidt, Azam and Boscardin, 2006). Altogether these explain a large part of educational inequality in India; which is not only one of the highest in the world, but it has not declined much in the last three decades (Thomas et al., 2000). Recent research using multiple rounds of nationally representative data documents the persistence of gender, caste and religion gaps in school participation and attainment.

Overall, these trends in inequality of educational outcomes are not conclusive of a reduction in inequalities of educational opportunities. For instance, there is evidence of continued importance of other “circumstance factors” such as parental wealth and education, which is suggestive of persistent inequality in educational opportunities. Indeed, India hosts a large part of the world’s out-of-school children, mostly belonging to poor households (Filmer and Pritchett, 1999).

1.2 Rationale of the study

Recently, gender and social disparity has been identified as a crucial category that deserves special attention in the education-equality paradigm [Abu-Ghaida and Klasen, 2004; World Bank, 2001; UNESCO, 2003; Muller, 2005]. Gender equality is a core principle of human development. To quote the eloquent words of Mahbub ul Haq, “Development, if not engendered, is endangered.” Another disparity in education is public and private schools. The emergence of private schools in different parts of India as an alternative to the government schools, particularly in the urban areas is becoming a phenomenon.

The literature on socio-economic determinants of educational attainments has mainly focused on enrolment and primary education. Generally employing limited dependent regression models, studies have identified factors like family income or wealth, parental education, credit constraints, age of the child, family size or presence of siblings, caste affiliations, place of residence and educational infrastructure as determinants of enrolment and primary school completion rates (Akhtar 1996; Deolalikar 1997; Tansel 1998; Brown and Park 2002; Connelly and Zheng 2003; Boissiere 2004; Desai and Kulkarni 2008; SIS/DPP 2005; Okumu et al 2008; Husain and Chatterjee 2009). These studies have also found the presence of strong gender differences.
The complex interrelationships between issues of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, religious orientation, and other discriminatory factors need to be taken into account. Education not only helps to overcome the inequalities between the castes, or gender or ethnic groups, but also has the potential to remove the inequalities within them.

1.3 Statement of the problem

In this backdrop I took up a comparative study on the different aspects of schooling in the two type’s management of primary schools (one Govt. -aided school and another private school in West Bengal).

1.4 Objectives

The study aims to understand the following objectives and to draw lessons relevant for policy modifications.

1. To study the gender and social disparities in primary education in Paschim Medinipur of West Bengal
2. To study the general perception of people and the reasons behind the choosing of different kinds of primary schools and its impact on access and participation of children in schools.
3. To study the kind of facilities are being made in terms of physical and academic infrastructure in two selected schools with special focus on student-teacher ratio, attendance, quality of teaching and learning, internal school management and so on;

1.5 Profile of the Country and area of study

The education landscape in India has changed enormously since its independence. This changed was brought about in various forms and levels, impacting the scope and quality of both demand and supply sides of public primary education in India. For years, India was focusing on issues of access, trying to universalize enrolment in primary schools. Education surveys from the 1990s show abysmally low levels of achievements for India in the field of education (De, Khera, Samson, and Kumar, 2011).

A major vexing phenomenon observed mainly in the low literacy regions, in the country and elsewhere, is the high rate of dropouts at a very early stage of education. In fact, the primary education policies in different parts of the world are aimed at reducing this high dropout rate by creating incentives to the students and the parents to keep the children in the school till they complete the desired level of education.

The present study particularly looks primary education in Midnapur threshold. The district Paschim Medinipur is situated in the south western side of West Bengal, extended between 21°47‘ N - 23°00‘ N latitude and 86°40‘ E - 87°52‘ E longitude (Figure 1). The total geographical area of the district is 9295.28 sq. Km, and has a population of 5,943,300, with a population density of 636 inhabitants per square kilometre as per 2011 census (http://www.census2011.co.in/district.php). The district is primarily
agricultural in nature, with cultivation being the chief livelihood of a majority of the people.

2.1 Review of related literature and Studies

A Survey of related studies was undertaken by the investigator to get an insight into the work that has already been in the field of this investigation and also to get suggestion regarding the ways and means for the collection of relevant data and interpretation of results. The studies reviewed are mainly on educational problems of the primary education.

**Banerjee, Rukmini (2000)** conducted field studies in Mumbai and Delhi to focus Poverty and primary schooling: The study, analyzed the hurdles, which have to be crossed in order to achieve universal primary education. The study revealed that the reason for so many children not being in school had less to do with their families economic circumstances than with the school system's shortcomings. The inadequacy of the school system to attract and keep children is more crucial than households’ economic conditions.

**Adhikari, Tejaswini (2001)** identified the gaps in the existing services and needs of students and teachers in the context of quality education. The survey included five schools, under Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC). The study revealed that the infrastructure of schools was in a very poor state. The number of classrooms, teachers, tables, and chairs were inadequate.

**Poromesh Acharya (2002)** wrote in the article “Education: Panchayat and Decentralisation Myths and Reality” that Since the 1950s, primary school education has seen a significant decline across certain regions of West Bengal. In this paper that focuses on three districts of the state, the sorry state of affairs that prevails in the panchayati system is largely to blame for the debacle. Panchayati raj institutions, instead of spearheading the decentralisation of the educational process, became a tool in the hands of the major political parties, which sought to implement populist policies like ‘no detention’ rather than bringing in a thorough revamp of the entire system.

**Kumar Rana, Samantak Das, With Amrita Sengupta, Abdur Rafique( 2003)** in the EPW article “State of Primary Education in West Bengal” obversed that successive efforts initiated by the Left Front government have played a positive role in the expansion of primary education in West Bengal. Poor attendance, perceived class differences, poverty and gender discrimination prevent socially underprivileged groups from accessing education opportunities. On the other hand, the success of the government’s experiment in providing cost-effective primary education, particularly to the most underprivileged sections of society must be recognised.

**Aggarwal Y.P. & Sunita Chugh (2003)** in their article “Learning Achievement of Slum Children in Delhi” pointed out based on a study that was conducted to examine the learners’ achievement level of slum children in the government schools and privately run unrecognised schools. The study tried to find out the achievement scores of Grade I and Grade IV children in language and mathematics. An effort was made to examine the inter-school and intra-school variations in mean percent achievement scores.
Pratichi Research Team (2006) focused on the rural and urban settlements in Bolpur-Santiniketan, Dubrajpur And Naihati. Three main types of primary schooling were found—government, private and non-government. The share of private and non-government schools in the overall primary education scene was found to be insignificant. (Less than 3 percent of the reported total enrolment was in these schools, with only 1.5 percent in rural areas.) However, in urban areas, the share of these two sectors was found to be 12.3 percent.

Karthik Muralidharan & Michela Kremer (2006) focused in their article, Public and Private Schools in Rural India, on a nationally-representative survey of rural private primary schools in India conducted in 2003. 28% of the population of rural India has access to fee-charging private schools in the same village.

Atanu Sengupta And Naibedya Prasun Pal (2010) pointed out that their analysis of the primary education system in India reveals certain disturbing features. First, the system is seriously jolted by the luck of adequate resources that are necessary to boost up a decent standard there appear wide zonal discrepancies in this regard. Second discrepancies with regard to social and policy indicators are more or less uniformly distribute.

Madhumita Bandyopadhyay (2014) pointed out in her article Education, Poverty And Exclusion that Poverty is considered as one of the contributing factors for access to education. The present paper provides an insight into the linkage between poverty and school education, focusing on different aspects like availability of schooling, facilities for poor, their access, participation, retention and so on.

The purpose of this literature review is to contextualize the challenges faced by the school education system in West Bengal. In this sense, the literature review presents a set of issues which need to be addressed in order to restructure the present system to ensure universal reach of quality education in the state.

3.1 Research Methodology

The methodology adopted for this micro study is primarily qualitative and interpretive in nature and attempts to capture the local dynamics that frame social and gender equity issues in primary schooling in Paschim Medinipur district in West Bengal.

Two schools are selected by stratified and purposive sampling method.
4.1 Analysis and Interpretation of Data

One govt. aided school (Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School) out of 26 govt aided schools in Midnapur town and one private Bengali medium school (Saraswati Sishu Mandir) out of 6 Saraswati Sishu Mandir schools is selected for study. The study reveals that the govt aided primary school is basically for low income Muslim students-the students are coming from basti areas. Though there is the lottery system of admission but there is no need as the number of students is low. On the other hand, private school are meant for upper class and caste. The students have been admitted through admission test in private school. The retention rate in the SSM public school, the private BENGALI medium school, was found to be comparatively higher than Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School (the govt aided). While the ratio of boys and girls in the selected Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School (the govt aided) was 28:40, In case of the Saraswati Sishu Mandir(SSM), ratio was a perfectly equal one.

Though the authorities of Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School reported that they have 4 classrooms and no office room. Actually, they have one big classroom; The big classroom is divided into 4 classrooms (separated by plywood). One classroom is used for officework, pointed out by the Headmistress. Then, there is one shortage of classroom. For this, Varandah is used for classII. While Saraswati Sishu Mandir(SSM) had more than ten rooms, the rest Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School govt. Aided had no office room and no teachers room. Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School, a govt. aided primary school, have only tap water is available. It has Aqua guard facilities. But it is not meant for the students; it is used only for teachers so the teachers can get purified through Aqua guard. On other hand, private schools have purified (by Aquaguard) drinking water facilities.

Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School, the govt. aided primary school, have separate toilets for girls and boys; however, boys toilet is not generally opened and sometimes, girls toilet is not properly usable. On the other hand, Saraswati Sishu Mandir(SSM) have separate toilets for boys and girls furnished with marbel and tiles and also facilited with sufficient tap water.

Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School, the govt. aided primary school are using the nearby Bidhannagar playground. The size of the playground of Saraswati Sishu Mandir(SSM), the Bengali medium private school is small. Actually, this school is given more importance to yoga exercise.

The Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School also had a better male-female ratio of teachers (40:60) than the District and State average (which were 85:15 and 75:25 respectively). The variation of the figures with the District and State average also indicates the problem of distribution of teachers. In the Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School, the Govt aided Primary School, there are five teachers, out of which, three are general teachers and two are SC teachers. Very few teachers in the private schools came from the lower caste.
The number of graduate teachers in Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School, the Govt aided Primary School is less (60 percent) than that in the Saraswati Sishu Mandir(SSM)(100 percent). In terms of trained teachers' the figures were almost reverse. A large number of Saraswati Sishu Mandir(SSM) teachers complained about the salary paid to them, which was, “nothing but a pittance”.

Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School, the Govt aided Primary School, and Saraswati Sishu Mandir(SSM), the private Bengali medium school, the researcher visited during the study are in the set, where the working days in a year ranged between 211-220. Apart from English (often for which more than one book was used), Saraswati Sishu Mandir(SSM) were found to have followed a curriculum with a broad range of subjects. The most important of the “extra” teaching appears to be the supposed emphasis given on English. While most of the teachers of the Saraswati Sishu Mandir(SSM) believed that it was quite essential for the children to “study a range of subjects and books to develop competitive skills”,

The monthly average attendance data showed that the performance of Saraswati Sishu Mandir(SSM), the selected private Bengali medium, as regards the attendance of children was the best among all kinds of primary schools with 95 percent attendance of the children. But, in case of Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School, Govt aided Primary School, the rate was much lower – 67 percent. Children in Saraswati Sishu Mandir(SSM) who generally came from upper income category households, did not have to face the problems encountered by the poorer students, owing to poverty and other socio-economic factors like poor educational background of the families. In most of the cases, children of Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School, the Govt aided Primary School, particularly girls who belonged to the lowly backgrounds were reported to have engaged themselves in many different kinds of works from domestic to income generating ones. Again, the opinions of the parents showed that no parent considered his or her child to have performed well. Rather they said that the performance was average. The main reason behind this was that a majority of the children could not even attend the schools regularly owing to their poor economic background.

In this study we found that a number of children (20 percent) of the Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School (who mainly came from poor families) did receive parental assistance. On the other hand the numbers of children of Saraswati Sishu Mandir (SSM) (private school) who did not receive parental assistance was ten percent. In case of the parents of Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School, the maximum education is junior high school. On the other hand, in the case of SSM, the parents are at least H.S.. The dependence of children of the Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School, the Govt aided Primary School, on private tuition was found in 60 percent cases. Most of The children are admitted into group coaching centre. It was quite surprising to note that the figure for reliance upon private tuition among the private schools children was also as high as 85 percent (mostly individual private coaching). In the appraisal the research members asked the children to answer some very simple questions pertaining to what has been reportedly taught in
their classes. Also it was unfortunate to note that some of the children even could not write their own name or the name of their school.

While a majority of the respondents of Bidhannagar Prantik Primary School, the Govt. Aided Primary School mentioned that they were communicated through the children (either verbally or through notes) and also through home visits (by teachers), in case of the Saraswati Sishu Mandir (SSM), a large section of parents said that the main mode of communication was sending notes written on the school diaries of the children. While the main reason behind choosing Bankim Smriti Primary school, the Government-Aided Primary School for enrolling children was found to be financial affordability of the parents. Interestingly, in case of the non-government schools, apart from the major reason of ensuring of quality of education, a range of other reasons were also given by a considerable section of the parents. W.E.C. members of the committee have not only neglected their duty but also they have a lot of excitement about money.

5.1 Recommendations
The findings suggest several implications for policy development. These are:

• It is evident that very large differences in educational attainment and access continue to exist and therefore must be addressed through public action. Such action must necessarily include reservations, but there have to be other strategies in addition, to ensure wider and more democratic access. These can include more public provision of educational institutions in backward areas and for deprived groups, more scholarships and other incentives for deprived categories, etc.

• The social reality of discrimination and marginalization in education is a more complex mosaic than is often presented. Such complexity needs to be noted and addressed when designing public policies. In particular, gender gaps which cut across social categories that are evident from these data need to be addressed.

• Inspection of schools at regular internal is needed. Special coaching to the backward children should be done.

• For fulfilling the quota or more number of SC and ST students at primary levels of education, both the public as well as the private initiatives are necessary for raising the level of academic attainment at the lower levels of education.

• Last but not the least, a consorted and coordinated action in different areas, including sensitization of males and females at all levels of society, reform of education systems is therefore highly necessary. This requires a reformation of the whole society. Changes in many different levels and the cooperation of all concerned actors will support such a change.
References


