



Denial of Primary Education: a Deprivation Unabated
The Role of Alternative Primary Education for Deprived Communities
(A Case Study from Jalpaiguri District in West Bengal, India)

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Dedicated to:

This paper is dedicated to the children coming from the socio-economically and educationally backward and deprived sections of Scheduled Castes (SCs); Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) whose basic and fundamental right to access quality primary education is being violated unceasingly, even today in India.

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List of Acronyms

ASER	Annual Survey of Education Report
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General
CRC	Convention on the Right of the Child
DISE	District Information of School Education
GoI	Government of India
GoWB	Government of West Bengal
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
MDM	Mid-Day-Meal
MDM	Mid-day Meal
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MoF	Ministry of Finance
NUEPA	National University of Educational Planning and Administration
OBC	Other Backward Classes
P and RD	Panchayat and Rural Development
PAISA	Planning Allocation and Expenditure Institution Assessment
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institution
PROBE	Public report on Basic Education
RBA	Right Based Approach
RtE Act	Right to Education Act
SC	Scheduled Caste
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
SHG	Self-help Group
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
SSK	Sishu Shiksha Karmasuchi
SSM	Sarva Shiksha Mission
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TSC	Total Sanitation Campaign
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WBBPE	West Bengal Board of Primary Education

Abstract

Primary education is the base for overall development of the individual and society. Hence it is a basic and fundamental right not only ensured by the Indian Constitution but it is also the second objective of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), which India has subscribed to, is the goal of Universalisation of the Primary/Elementary Education (UEE). Therefore, the Indian Government adopted primary education as a strategy to eradicate all forms of discrimination that exist between different socio-cultural groups within Indian society.

To ensure this, the Indian government launched and implemented the National Schemes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2001, across the length and breadth of the country, to provide compulsory primary education to all. Further, to strengthen the SSA, Indian Parliament has enacted the Right to Education Act (RtE)-2009 to provide free and compulsory primary education for all children in the age group between 6-14 years and has made it obligatory for State governments to provide and fulfil this right to all its citizens, irrespective of their different class, caste, creed, race, religion and ethnicity. Everyone should get an opportunity to access, retain and complete quality primary education through joyful learning. This in-turn will bring self-development among the children and overall development of the society and nation. However, even with the implementation of such national and state schemes/programmes, they have failed to reach the children living in the geographically remotest and backward regions where it is seen that the major concentration of population belong to the Schedule Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). It is these children who are getting denied access to free and compulsory basic quality primary education in India especially in West Bengal today.

The State Government of West Bengal has launched an innovative and alternative scheme of primary education that is Sishu Shiksha Karmasuchi (SSK) in 1997-98 to meet the educational demand of the people residing in the backward regions and required that this programme be owned and managed by the community, so that the community could address the need of primary education for their children and fulfil it with the support of the government. However with the passage of time the SSK programme has been undertaken by the government bodies and run as a parallel scheme of SSA. Therefore, there are major constraints that the programme is facing. There have not been any changes in the policy framework of SSK that is why the government officials still consider it to be a community-owned and managed programme and pay less attention to it. Along with the takeover by the government, the community has lost its legitimate power to run the programme. As a result the programme is running but in a neglected manner. For which the net sufferers are the children residing in the remote areas (belonging to SCs, STs, and OBCs communities) who fail to receive basic quality primary education.

My research paper will attempt to critically analyse the quality aspects of the existing primary education policy and its implementation mechanisms and processes in India and especially in West Bengal. I have done this through primary research in the backward regions of Metalli Block in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal, India, using qualitative methods of interview with different stakeholders. I have also analysed the research problem with the existing concepts mentioned in the literature regarding primary education in developing and developed country contexts that I have reviewed.

Relevance to Development Studies

Development refers to the social-cultural and economic upliftment and growth of the individual and community. To attain such growth every country plans and adopts several strategies and one such strategy adopted by all the countries across the world is education. Since education is one such strategy that has the power to overcome and eradicate social evils such as discrimination, inequality, deprivation, poverty and lack of or inadequate access to resources and services. Through the eradication of these social evils, upliftment of the socio-cultural and economic status and overall development of the individual takes place and through it, that of the community and nation. That is why governments of both the developed and developing countries especially India, where there still exist all forms of social evils, has adopted education as social policy to provide equal opportunities to all citizens for their overall development. Therefore, being a student of Social Policy for Development, I realised that it is necessary to discuss and critically analyse such social policy which has relevance to the main objectives of development issues and studies. That is why, I am critically analysing the primary education policy and its implementation mechanisms adopted by the Indian Government and West Bengal.

Keywords

Denial, Deprivation, Primary Education, Alternative Primary Education, Human Rights, Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, the Human Right to Education, Child Rights, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Affirmative Action, Policy-Making Processes, Policy Implementation Mechanisms and Processes, Metalli Block and Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal.

Chapter 1

Introduction

‘Basic education is more than an end in itself’
UNESCO, 1990

The crucial importance of the access to and completion of universal primary education lies in its greater impacts on social goals (Dre`ze and Sen, 1996; PROBE, 1999). Although, in the present-day context, public policy makers and corporate functionaries have often expressed the view that it is important for economic growth, the real significance of universal primary education goes much beyond this concern for accumulation of ‘human capital’. Rightly enough, it has been recognized as the base upon which every individual goes on to build his or her knowledge enterprise to proceed towards adding credence to the very notion of ‘human development’ (UNESCO, 1990). In its enumeration of the social impacts of primary education, the PROBE Report, 1999 emphasised the following eight factors: fundamental rights, popular demand, human capital, joy of learning, individual well-being, social progress, political participation and social justice (Dre`ze and Sen, 1996; PROBE, 1999).

The value of education has got to be appreciated not only by people who acquire it but also by those who surround them. Truly enough, the link between education and individual well-being goes much beyond its economic returns or the joy of learning (PROBE, 1999; ASER, 2005-12; Right to Education Act, 2009). A large segment of the population in India and other developing countries, especially the backward communities¹, couldn’t participate in decision-making through political processes because of illiteracy (Dre`ze and Sen, 1996). Universal primary education to all can bring social justice. But in India, there is a long history of educational disparities and social inequalities based on class, caste and gender (Bhagwati, 1973; Scrase, 1993; Dreze and Sen, 1996; Bhattacharya, 2002; Kumar, 2006; Sedwal and Kamat, 2008; Gaiha, et.al 2008; Ramachandran, 2009; UNICEF, 2011; Majumdar and Mooij, 2011).

To an appreciable extent, this state of affairs continues to exist even today: Privileged social groups have much better educational opportunities and this further enhances their privileges. The link between educational disparities and social inequality is gaining strength day by day as literacy and education became more important tools of self-defence’ (PROBE, 1999).

The links between literacy, schooling and education, paraphrasing Rabindranath Tagore’s view on education from the PROBE report under reference, are intricately connected with: ‘a right which enables individual and

¹In Part III of Fundamental Rights under Art. 15 (4) of the Constitution of India, 1950, the term backward communities/classes have been defined as those who are socially and educationally backward classes of citizens including Schedule Castes (SCs). Schedule Tribe (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

communities to act on reflection² (PROBE, 1999). Literacy is indeed an educational achievement of immense importance and it could be fulfilled through proper schooling where the quality of teaching and effective methods of pedagogy are followed (UNESCO, 1990). In India, the first stage relates to the elementary level of education³, which is free and compulsory and seeks to achieve literacy and numeracy for all by completing certain years of schooling (The Constitution of India, 1950; MHRD, 2001; RtE, 2009).

Under the concurrent list of the Indian Constitution, the implementation of primary education schemes and programmes are the shared responsibilities of the Central and state governments of the country. But in practice, state governments are the main actors to implement them. This is the reason as to why the reach and quality of the schooling system varies a great deal from state to state (Dre`ze and Sen, 1996, 2002; PROBE, 1999; ASER, 2005- 2012). In the last ten years, the state of elementary education in India rapidly improved in terms of infrastructures, teachers' number, enrolment rates and so on (MHRD, 2001; Govind, 2002; Aggarwal, 2002; Kingdom, 2007; Babu, 2009; Chanana, 2009; ShivaKumar and Rustagi, 2010; De, et.al, 2011; DISE Report-2002-03 to 2011-12). India's dismal performance in the field of elementary education is largely a reflection of state inertia. This takes the forms of under-provision of educational facilities, inadequate supervision, lack of accountability of the school system and blatant neglect of the disadvantaged communities. In order to achieve the goal of universalization of primary education, these issues need to be addressed.

To ensure universalisation of primary education, the Government of India launched and implemented the National Scheme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA- Universal Education Campaign)⁴ in 2001, across the country to provide free compulsory primary education to all. Along with the SSA, both the national and state governments run several supportive programmes to ensure quality primary education to all. In 2009, the Govt. of India⁵ passed the Right to Free & Compulsory Elementary Education (RtE) Act to add to its efforts for universalization of primary education. All the state governments became obliged to implement the said Act without any discrimination on the bases of caste, class, gender, religion, language, place of origin or place of residence. The policy objective is to *ensure access* by: 1) providing opportunities and 2) removing barriers/obstacles to access. A second main policy objective is *non-discrimination*.

The State government of West Bengal has taken up this SSA program as a "Mission" even naming it '*Sarva Shiksha Mission*' (SSM) and has set up a

²See "In a letter to the International League for the Rational Education of Children, dated 14 August, 1908" from the PROBE Report, chapter 1.6, pp.6, 1999.

³E.g. Eight years of schooling started from Class I-VIII under Article 45, Constitution of India & RtE Act, 2009. Where Class I-IV/V belongs to Primary Education (Pry) & Class VI-VIII belongs to Upper Primary Education (UP). Both Pry & UP Education is defined as 'Elementary Education' under Right to Free and Compulsory Elementary Education (RtE) Act, 2009, where the age group of child is mentioned as 6-14 years. This Act came into action on 1st April, 2010 in India.

⁴<http://mhrd.gov.in/elementaryeducation1>

⁵<http://planningcommission.nic.in/>

detailed administrative organisational structure to run the scheme properly. However, even with the implementation of SSM, elementary education has failed to reach the people living in the geographically remotest and backward areas where the major concentration of population are the SCs, STs and OBCs. It was almost impossible to open primary schools in every part of the state where there were children without access to primary schools. It is in this context, that it was only the State Government of West Bengal in 1997-98 who launched an innovative and alternative scheme of primary education that is ‘*Sishu Shiksha Karmasuchi*’⁶ (SSK: in English it means “Child Education Work Plan”) (P and RD, GoWB, 1997; Saikh, 2010) later on which also matched with the objectives of the SSM and got incorporated under the RtE Act in 2010. Even then children residing in the remote areas, are not getting access to quality education in school,. In this paper, appropriate and effective quality education refers to the institutional circular and pedagogic aspects including teachers training, teaching learning transaction, teacher’s education, curriculum renewal, physical inputs and so on as mentioned by UNESCO, 1990.

1.1 Research Focus:

My research focuses on primary education in the socio-economically and educationally backward rural areas of West Bengal, India. My main concern relates to the fact that people from backward communities in West Bengal, even today have inadequate and limited access to quality primary education. This is so, despite the many education programmes that the departments and agencies of the national and state governments have been running for long periods of time, which are directed at children specifically of SCs, STs, and OBCs.

This paper seeks to explain why and how severely problematic access to basic and primary education leads to chronic and ever-perpetuating social-economic and educational deprivation and discrimination of the backward communities. Also, can provision of basic education serve as an effective strategy for redressing obstacles to effective growth and development of tribal and indigenous people in West Bengal today? My research paper will attempt to critically analyse the quality aspects of the existing primary education system in India and especially West Bengal.

The paper starts by laying out the conceptual framework based on reviewed literature and then the research methodology is detailed. Thereafter, reports from the field and research finding are analysed and followed by conclusions and recommendations.

⁶ Please visit: “Sishu Shiksha Karmasuchi”, Department of Panchayat & Rural Development, Government of West Bengal <http://www.wbprd.nic.in/HtmlPage/ssk.aspx>

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework based on Reviewed Literature

In the last two decades, the Universalisation of Primary Education has been a prime focus on the policy agenda in India (PROBE, 1999; Dreze and Sen, 1996, 2002; Majumdar and Mooij, 2011). But the increase and [re]production⁷ of social and economic inequalities bring denial of access to quality primary education by the deprived communities such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in India. This constitutes a serious threat to justice and freedom (Dreze and Sen, 1996, 2002; Majumdar and Mooij, 2011). Although India is one of the fastest economically growing country in the world, the continued existence of class and caste struggles, restrict access and realisation of the basic and fundamental right to primary education of its citizens, especially those who are not included in mainstream society (Scrase, 1993; Sen, 2002; Bhattacharya, 2002; Chopra and Jeffery, 2005; Kumar, 2007a; Majumdar and Mooij, 2011). Both National and State government⁸ run many social welfare and social protection programs in India and especially in West Bengal. Moreover, there are *Affirmative Action* programs, both governmental and nongovernmental, that are specifically directed at the SCs, STs and OBCs. The Constitution of India provides a three-pronged strategy⁹ to improve the situation of SCs, STs and OBCs (Chopra & Jeffery, 2005). Nevertheless the illiteracy rate, the poverty gap, the unemployment and underemployment rates, the infant, child and maternal mortality rates are significantly higher (and often growing) for SCs, STs and OBCs communities as compared with the rest of the mainstream population of West Bengal today.

My argument is that if primary education is the base and main foundation for human development, then how will illiterate parents develop their thinking regarding the relevance of primary education for their child's overall development in society? How will their capacity develop since they belong to poverty stricken socio-economic backward classes where the daily

⁷ The term '[re]-production' coined by P. Bourdieu and Jean-Claude (1977/1990 second edition) in 'Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture', *Sage Publication*, London.

⁸ India has a Federal System of Governance with a Central Government at the national level and with a State Government in each of 28 States, of which West Bengal ranks 4th in population and 13th in area. Apart from National & State Government, other seven Union Territories (UTs) governed by the central administration.

⁹ The Constitution of India provides three-pronged strategy to improve the situation of SCs, STs and OBCs, such as: 1. *Protective Arrangements*: comprising such measures as are required to enforce equality, to provide punitive measures for transgression, to eliminate established practice that perpetuate inequality, etc. A number of laws have been for this purpose including *the Untouchability Practices Act, 1955, the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993*, etc. 2. *Affirmative Action*: by providing positive (preferential) treatment in allotment of public goods, jobs and access to higher education as a means to accelerate the integration of the SCs, STs and OBCs within mainstream society. Affirmative Action is popularly known as *reservation* or *quota* system in India. 3. *Development*: by providing resources and benefit to bridge the socio-economic gap between the SCs, STs, OBCs and other communities by national and State Government of India. (The Ministry of Law and Justice; Government of India).

struggle to survive is the main obstacle? From where will they secure quality education for their children, who are generally first-generation learners or might possibly be second generation learners, to develop their capabilities and development? Why and how does severely problematic access to basic and primary education lead to chronic and ever-perpetuating social and economic deprivation and disadvantage? How can provision of basic education serve as an effective strategy for redressing obstacles to effective growth and development of SCs, STs and OBCs in West Bengal today? To attempt to search for the answer, in this chapter, I am going to critically discuss the key concepts in my study, namely denial and deprivation, quality primary education, affirmative action for development and development approaches. The conceptual framework of this paper is described below.

2.1 Societal Inequality in the Primary Education System:

The main discourse between societal growth and reproduction of inequality construct the class struggle as the main limitation on access to quality primary education by the disadvantaged groups such as SCs, STs and OBCs in India today (Scrase, 1993; Dreze and Sen, 1996, 2002; PROBE, 1999; Bhattacharya, 2002; Chopra and Jeffery, 2005; Sedwal and Kamat, 2008; Majumdar and Mooij, 2011). The reality is that the lack of equity and ever-growing inequality of economic growth and market policy and practice by society, restrict people from disadvantaged groups and slow down the process of their overall societal development in India (Dreze and Sen, 2002). One of the main concepts of this paper is the reproduction of social inequalities within the education system of India (Scrase, 1993; Sen, 2002; Bhattacharya, 2002; Kumar, 2007a; Sedwal and Kamat, 2008; Majumdar and Mooij, 2011), and how this is contested in different ways that challenge denial of access and completion of quality primary education, perpetuating deprivation for SCs, STs and OBCs. This means, I seek to address questions such as:

- What are the main policy approaches and implementation mechanisms through which schooling reproduces social inequalities (of caste and class) within the national and state government run public schools?
- What has been the impact of policy efforts to redress inequalities in access to quality primary education?
- What has been the role of teachers and their motivation in reducing inequalities and how do innovative pedagogy practices and curriculum content reinforce change of social hierarchies?

Access to education, especially '*quality primary education*' (UNESCO, 1990) will help people belonging to disadvantaged groups to develop their base of thinking and knowledge, so that they could participate as a human resource in India's growing economic process. While a particular primary education system and its underpinning values may serve primarily for the reproduction of an unequal social order; the possibility of going against this mainstream is not foreclosed in India.

Obviously, there is a historical context regarding education and inequality that needs to be taken into account to understand the contemporary development of education and school system in India (Scrase, 1993; PROBE, 1999; Chopra and Jeffery, 2005; Sedwal and Kamat, 2008; Majumdar and

Mooij, 2011). Majumdar and Mooij divided the historical trajectory of the educational development process in India into three distinctive phases: ‘the colonial period, the period of nation-building in the first decades after independence, and the subsequent phase in which India became increasingly integrated in a globalised economy’ (Majumdar and Mooij, 2011). In each of these phases, education has played a different, but vital role in developmental processes. In the colonial period, the colonial administration provided education to train a few people as ‘*clerks*’ (ibid). “The Macaulay’s Minute on Indian Education (1835)”¹⁰, explicitly states that the objective of colonial education policy is the creation of ‘a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern- a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’ (Majumdar and Mooij, 2011). According to Viswanathan (1989) ‘the imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England...in the long run served to strengthen Western cultural hegemony in enormously complex way’ (as quoted in Majumdar and Mooij, 2011).

Bhattacharya (2002) raises the issue that ‘indigenous schools, teaching in the vernacular languages, were left to decay’ Colonial education, basically, meant that already existing privileges were reproduced in new ways: access to English education became a marker of social advantage, and an important factor in the perpetuation of the hegemonic position of certain group’ (as quoted in Majumdar and Mooij, 2011). After independence, when the nation-building process sought to produce expertise for the modern sector in India, in many parts of the country, access to education was certainly dominated and largely restricted to the elite and middle classes (Kumar 2007a in his study on “colonialist and nationalist idea of education”). In the more recent period, ‘education for nation-building has been replaced by education for a globalised market. In the post-Independence era, education was conceptualised mainly with a utilitarian framework and because of that the human capital approach and the idea of manpower planning dominated the country’s policy consciousness’ (Majumdar and Mooij, 2011). But in the recent period of time, utilitarian arguments completely shifted the emphasis to human capabilities, human development and ‘education as right’ in the country’s policy idiom (Majumdar and Mooij, 2011). In 1990, the goal was adopted of “*universalization of elementary education*” based on “*education for all*” (EFA) (UNESCO, 1990) in India, and a number of policies and implementation mechanisms followed in pursuit of such goal. Government of India has introduced several large-scale programme such as ‘*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)*’ and supplementary national and state programmes to achieve this goal¹¹. After the ‘*Right to Education (RtE) Act*’, 2009, primary education is to be protected and promoted as a fundamental all States and Union Territories (UTs) have to provide free and compulsory primary education for all children aged between 6-14 years without any class and caste differentiation and discrimination. In the last two decades, the result of these efforts has been a significant increase in *quantity* enrolment

¹⁰ Further see Minute by the Hon’ble T.B. Macaulay, dated 2 February 1835, downloaded from http://www.columbia.edu/itc/meacac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_educati_on_1835.html (accessed on 12 Nov, 2013)

¹¹ Here I am referring particularly to the programmes initiated under the agencies of the central government throughout the country, such as District primary Education Planning (DPEP), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Mid-day-Meal (MDM) and Sishu Shiksha Karmasuchi (SSK).

at the primary level and major reduction of the gender gap and class-caste conflict therein.

The social inequalities operative within the primary school system are not a new phenomenon. They are persistent and often considered as 'normal' both by those who benefit from the existing school system and by those who are excluded or are included in an unfavourable manner (Scrase, 1993; PROBE, 1999; Majumdar and Mooij, 2011). In the current context, a concerted effort have been made all over the world and especially in India to achieve universal primary education and this has led to a mass entry in the education system of groups who were hitherto denied and deprived access the school. But Majumdar and Mooij raise the question 'has this entry of the previously denied and deprived groups been a beneficial development?' Several positive developments have occurred through class opening in the primary school education system over the last two decades resulting in wider educational participation of the masses. They also argue that 'yet there remains a yawning gap between the quality of primary education offered to the patrician and to the plebeian. As a result, division and disparities continue to exist, although sometimes in new garb'.

2.2 Rights-Based Approach to Primary Education:

The universalistic approach that the UN adopted to compulsory and free primary education has been to guarantee primary education as a fundamental right especially for disadvantaged groups. How has India adopted this right for its children within the existing class and caste discrimination that has persisted for decades? This part of the conceptual framework deals with the '*Right Based Approach* (RBA)' to access and completion of the quality primary education within the context of unequal access to education today. A critique of the legacy and gap between existing laws and its practice in the field needs to be made. How can this RBA fulfil the notion of reducing inequality and ensuring universal access and completion of free quality primary education for the disadvantaged groups?

Education has been recognized as a basic and fundamental right under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. The UDHR seeks to protect, promote and ensure universalism of the right to elementary education through Art- 26:

- 1) *'Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit'.*
- 2) *'Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace'. (UDHR, 1948).*

Subsequently the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 16 December, 1966) adopted the universal approach towards elementary education for development of the human personality and

fundamental freedom to all state parties. Art 13 (2a) states that *‘Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all’*. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989)¹², ratified by India in 1992, specifies education as a basic right for all children. India has committed to deliver free primary education to everyone and specifically the *‘obligation’* of four core principles: *non-discrimination, protection of the child’s interests, right to life, survival and development, and the right of children to express their views* (UN Assembly, 1989a, 1989b; Jonsson, 2005; Lundy, 2007; Nayak, 2012).

To fulfil the parameters set forth by the UN conventions and treaties in the early years, a road map named “Millennium Declaration” was developed by the UN in 2000 to reduce poverty and human deprivation by 2015; which 189 member countries including India adopted by consensus, without vote. (End of Poverty 2015: Millennium Campaign, 2000; Hume, 2009, Peeters, 2010). This approach has eight “*Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs)”, one of which is *‘access to primary education for all children by 2015’*. This goal has been given slot number 2 among the eight goals since it is crucial for protecting, promoting and securing other rights of people for their self-development and that of the nation. Des Gasper paraphrases Alston’s view that *‘work on the MDGs, national and global, has paid very little attention to human rights conventions and theory; and conversely; human rights organisations have remained predominantly detached from perhaps the central contemporary program in the international development field’*. MDG monitoring and human rights monitoring mechanisms have largely ignored each other’ (Alston, 2005: 814-25; Gasper, 2007). In 2004, Mary Robinson, the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, made a clear admission that *‘Making the language and approach of human rights accessible to wider audiences has proved difficult’* (Robinson, 2004: 868; Gasper, 2007). Gasper quoting from Robinson’s work and analysing the discourse between rights based approach and its practice in reality states that, *‘...we are far from arriving at a position where those working in the human rights tradition and those working in the development tradition feel that they speak the same language. If mutual curiosity has increased, confidence is far from being safely established’* (Robinson, 2005: 31; Gasper, 2007).

Since Independence, The Constitution of Indian included this right in the form of a Directive Principles that aimed at guiding governance. This meant that the country aspired to achieve universal elementary education for all children up to the age of 14 years from the time of independence, and successive Indian governments also adopted policies that could facilitate this aspiration (Jha et.al, 2013). In 1950, India made a constitutional commitment to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14, by adding a provision in article 45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy. The constitution (86th) amendment act introduced the right to education (RtE) as a fundamental right. The Right to Education bill, 2005 gives effect to the constitution (86th) amendment act. As a compromise however, Art-21 (A) (inserted in the chapter on fundamental rights by the 86th Constitutional amendment) states:

¹² See: UNCRC; Art 28 & 29, Nov 20, 1989 that came into force Sep 2, 1990.

'The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6 to 14 years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine'. (Article 21 A, The Constitution of India, 1950).

'The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years'. (Article 45, The Constitution of India, 1950).

Nalini Juneja and some others argue in their papers that 'Article 45 will not, as was being considered earlier, be deleted. Instead, the content of Article 45 of the Constitution is being substituted by: "*Art 45: The State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years*". The provisions of Article 21 (A) itself state that they are to be implemented in such manner as the State may by law determine. As such the legislation that would give effect to the provisions of this clause would play a determining role in the future of Indian Education' (Juneja, 2003; Sadgopal, 2010). She asks, 'How should this all important piece of legislation be framed in order for it to ensure that every child is assured of the right to education? Can one learn from the existing state legislation on compulsory education, or does compulsory education not fit in with the present 'rights-based approach', in which education is a 'Right', and not a compulsion on a person' (Juneja, 2003). Sadgopal (2010), pointed out issues especially relating to SCs, STs and OBCs children in the Constitution 'in Article 46, the State is directed to "promote with special care the educational and economic interests.....of the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes....." and also as per Article 39 (f) in Part IV, the State shall "direct its policy towards securing...that children are given opportunity and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment'.

Enactment by the Indian Parliament on 4 August 2009, of "The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act" (RtE) made India one of 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of every child (RtE, 2009; Jha et.al, 2013). 'The 86th Constitutional Amendment was first introduced in Parliament in 2002 and took more than 6 years to be passed and finally receive presidential assent in 2009 to be notified as an Act on 1st April 2010' (Jha et.al, 2013). It was intended to provide a legally enforceable right to basic education for all without any exclusion and free from discrimination or bias based on caste, class, gender, religion, language, place of origin or place of residence. However, Jha et.al (2013) argues that 'it was still not a justiciable right. By moving this provision to Article 21 (inserted as Article 21A) and converting this to a fundamental right, the new Act has converted this aspiration into a commitment. The Act, however, has excluded the 0-6 year age group who continue to figure in Art 45 of Directive Principles'. To criticize the RtE Act, Das (2010) pointed out in his edited book on "Right to Education", that 'RtE is not only necessary for the governments to bring universal access but also assure that even the marginalized children are reached. That means not only bringing the children to school but enabling the means for them to achieve their economic and social aims and get the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes necessary to accomplish their actual participation in society'. He raised the issue of quality aspects that are seriously lacking in RtE and criticized that 'receiving poor quality education can be a sort of discrimination because it prevents children to get a competent insertion to the society' The

RBA is none other than the commitment to recognize and respect the rights of children while they are in school including respect for their identity, agency and integrity' (Das, 2010; Nayak, 2012). Jha et.al (2013) argued that 'the Act defines the schooling-related entitlements of a child: they include the norms for physical infrastructure and teachers, and the responsibilities of the school in terms of making the child free from fear, trauma and anxiety and helping the child to express her/his views comprehensively. All these norms, standards and provisions are applicable to each and every school providing education from grade I to VIII whether run by government or private entities'. Jha et.al raise the issue of accountability 'considering that a large number of schools, a majority of them being located in the state sector, do not currently fulfil these norms, this is indeed a huge thrust for accountability on the part of the State' (ibid). In Sadgopal's (2010) article on "Right to Education vs. Right to Education Act", he raised the issue of 'education of equitable quality' and critically mentioned 'by reading Article 45 in conjunction with Article 14 and 15 (1), the Right to Education movement inferred more than ten years ago that the State is duty bound to build a system of education that provides '*education of equitable quality*' to all children without any discrimination whatsoever! It follows that elementary education must be provided in such manner '*as not to violate other provisions*' of the Constitution, especially Fundamental Rights. For instance, educational planning needs to be '*consonant with the principles of equality and social justice*' enshrined as Fundamental Rights. It would suffice to state here that any programme that provides education of varying quality to different sections of society and denies education of equitable quality is not allowed by the Constitution'.

With the implementation of this Act, it is expected that issues of quality education, out-of-school children, school dropouts and the availability of trained teachers will be addressed in the short-to-medium term plans by the State. Here, Jha et.al (2013) point out that 'the federal nature of Indian polity and diversity of educational structures meant that though the Act is applicable for the entire country, the state governments needed to frame their own rules for its implementation'. The central government framed model rules and made it available to states for guidance. Different state governments took their own time in framing the rules, and while some have retained more or less all the features of the model rules, some have modified them to suit their specific situations and interests'. So, the emphasis has sequentially shifted from the main aims and objectives of the Act to state interests that are why the disadvantaged groups such as SCs, STs and OBCs are still far away from accessing and completing free and compulsory adequate and effective quality primary education.

2.3 Inclusive Primary Education: A Strategy through Affirmative Action:

How has the process of 'inclusive primary education' been pursued through a strategy of *affirmative action* practiced all over the world and especially in India today? Most of the state governments incorporated this strategy that could only achieve the *quantity* aspects of providing school and infrastructure facilities.

Internationally the principal of basic and primary education has been accepted as a fundamental right under the human rights framework in the last few decades. However, the experiences in many developing countries show that a large number of children are not able to complete the minimum number of school years, especially those who belong to disadvantaged groups and children with special needs for learning and completion to fulfil their fundamental right (Jha, 2007).

When and how did the concept of 'inclusive education' originate? In the year 1994, the World Conference based on 'Special Needs Education: Access and Quality' by UNESCO urged all governments to adopt as a matter of law and policy the principles of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular school, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise' i.e. known as 'The Salamanca Statement' (Salamanca Statement, UNESCO, 1994, pp. ix; Jha, 2007; Gray, 2007). Subsequently, the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal approved a comprehensive vision of 'Education for All' (EFA) to be achieved by 2015 and the World Conference on EFA, 1990, aimed at providing quality primary education to all children irrespective of any discrimination as a means of their basic and fundamental rights for self-development and growth of the nation (World Education Forum, UNESCO, 2000). There are two distinctive perspectives on inclusive education: first are those emerging largely from the developed countries and second are those referring to the felt needs and circumstances prevailing in the developing world (Jha, 2007). Here he pointed out that 'in richer developed countries, education is largely inclusive of girls, the disadvantaged and all ethnic minorities'. However, a plethora of critical literature has emerged recently, re-examining the concept of 'inclusive education' from an educational reform perspective. Schools in this critical perspective should respond and adapt to the needs of all children, regardless of gender, physical, cognitive and sensory needs, ethnicity, religious and cultural background, and fit themselves to children's learning styles and needs, and not the other way round (ibid). A few scholars such as Ferguson (1996), Udvari-Solner (1998), Thomas et al. (1998), Ainscow (1999), Mittler (2000) and Jha (2007) have extensively discussed the school reforms perspective in order to develop the concept and practice of inclusive education. Jha (2007) paraphrasing Sebba and Ainscow (1996) defines inclusion: '*Inclusion describes the process by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering its curricular organisation and provision. Through this process, the school builds its capacity to accept all pupils from local community who wish to attend and, in so doing, reduces the need of excluded pupils*'. His presumption in this definition is that 'most students from the local community would 'wish to attend' the neighbourhood regular schools. Those who do not may be going either to a special school or to private (including boarding) schools. On the other hand, he pointed out the main 'discourse on inclusive education in developed countries mostly centres on the extension of special education, or at most a reform of special education practice' (ibid). Again the Dakar Forum, called for national education systems to take into account the poor and most disadvantaged 'including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health, and those with special learning needs' to fulfil the agenda of inclusive education (UNESCO, 2000). It also aimed at recognising the hazards that lie for children with significant learning difficulties in studying

in segregated schools (Gray, 2007). Therefore Jha (2007) argues 'Does 'inclusive education' offer a solution'?

For a fast growing economy such as India and with globalisation in the recent past, education is the single most powerful medium through which people could aim towards self-development and cherish their goals and that of the nation (Bhagwati et al., 1987; Siddiqui, 2007). Despite some of the education policies in the past for out-of- school children and to provide access and completion of quality primary education by its most the SCs, STs and OBCs, India failed to ensure and secure their constitutional rights to education apart from the quantity achievements (Siddiqui, 2007). To ensure and protect the rights of SCs, STs and OBCs and give them preferential treatment in access to higher education, jobs and bring them within the fold of mainstream society, the government adopted some of the '*affirmative actions*' such as that of *reservation*. It also adopted protective actions such as the *Untouchability Practices Act, 1955*, the *Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989*, the *Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993*, etc.(Ministry of Law and Justice, Govt. of India). In the Indian context *affirmative action* could be understood from the economic theory of Glenn Loury that distinguishes between "human capital" and "social capital". Human capital refers to the individual's own characteristics which are valued by the labour market and social capital refers to the value that an individual receives from community membership of access to information networks, mentoring and reciprocal favours (Cunningham, 1999). His point of view is that: 'Potential human capital can be augmented or stunted depending on available social capital'. And the limitation of human potential could be caused by restricting access to social capital, which is also seen in the case of India leading to hindered growth of the state and its people. To provide opportunity to develop human potential, India has a long history of affirmative actions which are phrased largely in terms of assisting backward groups for mainstreaming and these affirmative actions that are in place have been formulated and implemented in the laws and constitutional amendments of India (ibid).

Government adopted education as a strategy to protect the deprived communities' children from all kinds of social, moral, emotional, and economic exploitation and deprivation (Weiner, 1991, Siddiqui, 2007). In the National Policy on Education, 1986 and its revisions carried out in 1992, it was envisaged that in order to provide special support for the education of children in urban slums, working children and children in underserved areas, hill areas and tribal areas, Non Formal Education (NFE) centres should be opened with state support from both government and NGOs. These centres aimed at having organisational flexibility, relevance of curriculum, diversity on learning activities to relate them to *learners' need*, and *decentralisation of management* (MHRD, 1986). With the opening of 272,000 NFE centres with an enrolment of 6.8 million children in 1992, the 'Revised Programme of Action' (RPOA) declared the strengthening of the NFE schemes to serve those children who cannot attend formal schools (MHRD, 1992; Siddiqui, 2007). Even the 8th Five year Plan emphasised non-formal education centres for out-of-school children and children with special needs (Kanth, 2005; Siddiqui, 2007). Eventually in 2000, the Government launched a massive scheme of 'Efa' called 'SSA' as a

mission which incorporated many important strategies for out-of-school children with special circumstances. It includes the idea of 'Alternative and Innovative Education' (AIE) centres, 'Education Guarantee Scheme Centres' (*Balika Shiksha*), and back-to-school camps for bridge courses for children who had dropped out of school (MHRD, 1992; Siddiqui, 2007). A ten-year programme of Universal Elementary Education (UEE) was to be completed in 2010 with the hope that all children belonging to disadvantaged and deprived communities would be enrolled in schools or alternative education institutions. Many alternative education centres, have been opened in rural and urban areas, but the infrastructure and teaching resources in them are not comparable with formal schools by any reckoning (Siddiqui, 2007; Rampal, 2009). The access of universal primary education by all was further strengthened by the enactment of the RtE Act (2009) and by the Indian Constitution making access to free and compulsory quality primary education for all legally binding and making it obligatory for all states to provide such education to its citizens.

Despite all these policies and constitutional amendments which grant the Right to Education as a Fundamental Right of the children, India is not moving in a direction towards inclusive education where all categories have access to quality education. EfA still remains irrelevant, unattractive or actively rejected by those backward categories (Siddiqui, 2007). There are several reasons behind this including non-availability of proper schools, poor and irrelevant course curriculum, lack of teachers and other relevant infrastructure like building and furniture, non-availability of text books, teaching materials, and lack of employment opportunity and of further education after completing elementary education (Aggarwal, 2004; Siddiqui, 2007). Limited and poor training of teachers along with their indifferent and rather hostile attitude towards children of SCs, STs and OBCs, are also responsible for poor quality of education and high drop-out of children. According to scholars such as Burra (1995), Weiner (1991), Sadgopal (2003) and Siddiqui (2007), the answer to the problem of denial of access and compulsory primary education for SCs, STs and OBCs children lies in compulsory elementary education and non-formal education with work (earning while learning) is a myth as it is neither feasible nor desirable. Again Sadgopal (2003) rightly observes that there has been a dilution of the policy commitment to the principal of 'education of equitable quality' in the last fifteen years. Instituting parallel layers of educational facilities only ensures maintenance of social hierarchies of class, caste, culture and gender. The Common School system with neighbourhood schools as envisaged in the Kothari Education Commission's Report (1964-66) has been committed to by Parliament, in approving national education plans in the years 1968, 1986 and 1992 (Siddiqui, 2007). As rightly pointed out by Bagley in 2007, 'India stands at a threshold of economic change and cultural development. Its 'EfA' policies are only now, some fifty years after independence, being implemented properly. And only in some voluntary schools are children with 'special needs' being included' (Jha, 2002; Bagley, 2007).

Furthermore, pressure to achieve the goal of UEE in the state, went up after the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) (which aimed at bringing the drop-out and out-of-school children back to school) was successfully launched in the State in early 1990. The demand could not be effectively met with free and

compulsory formal primary education systems available during this time period. It was almost impossible to open primary schools in every part of the state where there were children without access to primary schools. It is in this context, that the State Government of West Bengal launched an innovative and alternative scheme of primary education that is '*Sishu Shiksha Karmasuchi* (SSK)¹³ in 1997-98 which is also related to the objectives of the SSA. Not only in the case of the SSK in West Bengal but all affirmative actions taken by the government including education are encountering challenges. The extension of affirmative action to caste groups is heavily based more on the political interest of a particular state, rather than their actual need for preferential treatment relative to other groups. This leads to denial and deprivation faced by the backward communities in accessing any basic needs for building up their individual capacities for self-development including accessing and completion of adequate and effective quality primary education. Jha (2002) offers 'an idealistic vision in his picture of "a school without walls" which: *'Removing barriers and bringing all children together in school irrespective of their physical and mental abilities, or social or economic status, and securing their participation in learning activities leads to the initiation of the process of inclusive education. Once walls within school are broken, school moves out of their boundaries, end isolation and reach out to the communities. The distance between formal schools, non-formal schools, special schools and open schools will be eliminated'*

2.4 Human Capability Approach and Enjoyment of Freedom:

The concurrent academic debates on '*human capability approach*' and '*enjoyment of freedom*' towards access and completion of quality primary education by deprived communities is a very complex issue in the developing countries. Modern era policy-makers and academicians are debating for an interest that is prone to alleviating poverty in the Global South where the socio-economic inequalities are acute and a threat to development in the field of primary education. The general recipe for human capability seems to be very utopian that by aspiring high, having talent and making an effort to study one can earn a better place in society. For example take India, where socio-economic inequality not only exist historically and where disadvantaged groups struggle for survival. Government initiatives are very prone towards *quantity* achievements through social policies and schemes providing school infrastructure, facilities, and number of teachers and focussing on enrolment rather than on quality achievement through inclusion of SCs, STs and OBCs. Human capability can only develop through social processes where people can access basic resources without any socio-economic barrier and restriction and enjoy the freedom to fulfil it without any hesitation. Access and completion of quality primary education is an important strategy to build overall human capability and secure human development. But the main question is how will these people from SCs, STs and OBCs communities develop their capacity and capability? The major socio-economic development processes are based on social schemes prone to *quantity* and *economy* in India. Obviously, the last two decades of initiation, enrolled huge amounts of students in primary education from every group, but the question is: do these enrolments fulfil the quality

¹³ Specifically the State Government of West Bengal, 1997 initiated a programme such as Sishu Shiksha Karmasuchi (SSK) to cater the needs of geographically backward communities, where communities could participate to address educational needs.

aspects of basic primary education where those disadvantaged groups could build-up their capability for further aspects?

The '*Human Capability Approach (HCA)*' was first coined by Amartya Sen through the notion of '*capabilities*' in 1980. According to him, the notion of capability relates centrally to 'freedom' --- the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead' (Dre`ze and Sen, 1995, p. 10; Saito, 2003). The capability approach to human well-being is a 'concentration on freedom to achieve in general and the capabilities to function in particular', and the core concepts of this approach are 'functionings and capabilities' (Sen, 1995, p. 266). According to Sen (1987, p. 36), 'a functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve'. In 1980, Sen presented his argument in his paper 'Equality of What?' He introduced the concept of capability for the first time and criticised the Gore's argument that 'the evaluation of equality' should merely be based on information about people's sense of happiness or desire fulfilment, or on their command of primary goods (Gore, 1997; Saito, 2003). Earliest challenges he faced from utilitarian economics, after that he adopted the 'basic needs' perspective (Saito, 2003). Later on Saito (2003) argues in his paper titled "Amartya Sen's Capability Approach to Education: A Critical Exploration" that 'this approach emphasises the notion that people have to meet fundamental needs to achieve wellbeing. For instance, they need food not to starve, and shelter and clothing to lead a recognisably human life. This approach emphasised the point that per capita income is not an adequate measure of a person's well-being, since raising incomes alone will not always increase well-being. Moreover, it claims that everyone should have access to the goods and services that satisfy their basic needs'. If so, then only providing *quantity* numbers of schools or other facilities cannot develop the notion of human capability of socio-economically disadvantaged groups of illiterate people?

Clark (2005) in his paper based on 'The Capability Approach: Its Development, Critiques and Recent Advances' states that 'the CA, however, probably has the most in common with the "*Basic Needs Approach (BNA)*"¹⁴ to development pioneered by Paul Streeten et al (1981) and Frances Stewart (1985), amongst others'. In an early period, Sen tried to distinguish between the CA and BNA approaches through a fivefold critique of the latter that he published in a paper entitled "Goods and People" (Sen, 1984, pp.513-5; Clark, 2005). Some of Sen's criticisms, however, appear to misrepresent the BNA (Alkire, 2002, pp.166-170; Clark, 2005). 'In particular the argument that the BNA lapses into a form of commodity fetishism has been challenged. While this is a valid criticism of the original formulation of basic needs (ILO, 1976), the architects of the new basic needs approach have reiterated that [t]he concept of basic needs as we understood it, was not (as is sometimes thought) centred on the possession of commodities' (Clark, 2005). Instead, the argument was more concerned with providing all human beings, but particularly the poor and deprived sections, with the opportunities for a full life of all (Streeten et al., 1981, p.21; Clark, 2005). Nevertheless, it is now widely recognised that the CA manages to bring together many of the concerns of basic needs theorists (originally expressed in a rather ad-hoc manner) into a

¹⁴ See Paul Streeten et al (1981) and Frances Stewart (1985) the pioneer of 'Basic Needs Approach (BNA)'.

single coherent philosophical framework (Streeten, 1984; Stewart and Deneulin, 2002; Alkire, 2002; Clark, 2005). Moreover, unlike the BNA, the CA extends beyond the analysis of poverty and deprivation and often concerns itself with wellbeing generally. Finally, Alkire's (2002) observation that the single most important function of the CA is to make explicit some implicit assumptions in the BNA about the value of choice and participation and the disvalue of coercion.

Last but not least, Sen (2000) also propagated that human freedom including access to education could be achieved through the growth of national and individual income which is possible only by the advancement of other determinants such as socio-economic arrangements and political and civil rights. He even emphasizes that people could claim their freedom by using their political rights through the democratic political process. Having said so, he has been heavily criticised by Amiya Bagchi (2000), who opined that 'But doubts about the real world of liberal democracy multiply when we look at how actually existing democracy operates under the capitalist order'. This is very true in the case of West Bengal and the backward communities' inspite of being given the power of decision-making with regard to their needs for quality primary education. However, in reality, their political representation and decision making power is directly governed by the respective government departments and vested political interest and willingness.

As some of the authors have criticized, the HCA cannot be applied to education, especially providing education to the backward communities. It is true that for the backward communities the human capability approach does not stand any point since they are not acquiring or getting access to their basic needs that will increase their capacity. Therefore first, the backward people have to be given access to adequate quality of basic needs including basic quality primary education and then slowly and steadily their capacity will develop. (Bagchi, 2000; Saito, 2003). Education is a strategy to eliminate poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, discrimination and lack of/or inadequate access to basic resources and services. Therefore mere provision of schools will not suffice the requirement for accessing and completing quality primary education by all. Rather, what is required are more cohesive educational policies and programmes, priorities, objectives and activities based on providing adequate quality; efficient structures of implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and structures of grievance handling, dispute resolution and accountability. Then only, could the socio-economic gap between SCs, STs and OBCs be bridged. Denial of access and completion of quality primary education triggers continuous deprivation as will be demonstrated by the field findings in Chapter Four.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Methodology:

Methodologically, this study has both components of intensive primary and secondary research. ‘Intensive research’ means- a research strategy to find out how particular social processes might be working out in a particular case of study and tends to study actors in their context (Sayer, 1992: pp. 241-51). Primarily this method includes use of interactive interviews, focus group discussion (FGD), case study analysis, ethnographic methods, qualitative and quantitative analysis. The main purpose of this intensive research is not to develop descriptive interpretation rather to find out the meanings of the context and circumstances where people or respondents are confronted by the social events. Also how the social events or incidents affect their behaviour patterns, practices and actions and contribute to the production of a particular social reality (Sayer, 1992).

I have started my research work by analysing the secondary data based on articles, journals and reports on primary education of both governmental and non-governmental agencies in the context of developed and developing countries especially India and West Bengal (WB) today. This is done through literature search and desk review. To get an insight of the concepts in relation to the present-day context, primary research work was conducted in the Metalli Block of West Bengal.

3.2 Rationale of Study Area: Selection of State and regions within State:

The primary data for this research has been collected from the Indian State of West Bengal. This state is populous, has a robust urban and rural economy and is of strategic importance since it borders not only neighbouring Bangladesh and Bhutan but also the north eastern region of India where social unrest and violent conflict are widespread. The state has the ever-increasing age-specific child population in 2010 compared to the Indian context (see Table 1.1). WB has a large, mainly rural, number of SCs, STs and OBCs people who have faced social deprivation from colonial times to the present¹⁵. For them, denial of access to quality primary education takes the form of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, discrimination and lack of or inadequate access to basic resources and services. I have selected this state partly for pragmatic reason and also because I belong to this state. In West Bengal there exists the State Government’s initiative of ‘alternative primary schooling’ along with the National Government’s initiative Sarva Shiksha Mission (SSM) whereas other States of India only have the SSA programme for primary education¹⁶ It is also interesting how different strategies of implementation mechanisms for the

¹⁵ 48.5% of the population of West Bengal is made up of tribal and indigenous people who are defined in the Constitution of India as Schedule Castes, Schedule Tribes and Other Backward Classes. The figure for entire India is approximately 60% based on Census Report, 2011, Government of India.

¹⁶ As on 31st March, 2011 there were 76364 eligible Primary Schools and Shishu Shiksha Kendras and AIE Centres with an enrolment of 9492981 students from class I to class V (MHRD, 2011).

same goal exist for decentralising school management. In the course of my field work, however, it became clear that real decentralised management hardly existed. Recently, WB has made progress in spreading primary education (see Annex 1 and 2), but the task of universalising quality primary education remains formidable and complex.

Table 1.1
Age Specific School Going Child Population in West Bengal-2010-11

Child Population in 2010 (Age Specific norms under RtE Act, 2009)						
National vs State	6-10 Years			11-13 Years		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
India	61068605	55574555	116643160	37389245	35204194	72593439
West Bengal	3987268	3838514	7825782	2642300	2586808	5229108
National vs State	14-15 Years			16-17 Years		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
India	25303448	23550800	48854248	25715776	23711714	49427490
West Bengal	1815790	1751812	3567602	1868337	1781822	3650159

Source: Statistic of School Education-2010-11; Ministry of Human Resource Development, Gol

Belonging to the state of WB, I am aware of the historical and political legacy, the complex structure of school administration and above all the politics of school education. The State has experienced for an uninterrupted period of over 30 years political rule by the Communist Party of India (Marxist)¹⁷. Although the Left Front government pursued economic policies very similar to those adopted in other Indian States by other political parties- mainly in the last decades- the State is exceptional because of its long and steady history of one-party dominance. However a milestone has been created by people in 2010 when the Assembly Election changed the 30 years political regime of the Left Front Government to the Right Wing Trinomul Congress Party. So it will be interesting to observe how civic initiatives and dialogue can support governmental action in primary education. Also, how will the two types of primary schools (SSK and SSM) and their administration cope within the new government's strategy? Alternative primary education, after all was the previous government's initiative to decentralise power by involving the community in school management and decision-making.

Within the State, I have selected one district of educationally and geographically backwardness i.e. Jalpaiguri, where the major concentration of population belongs to the SCs, STs and OBCs. Within the district, I focussed mostly on the socio-economically, educationally and geographically backward block of Metalli among the other 13 Blocks by using education and backward communities as indicators (see Table 2.2).

¹⁷ Here the Left Front, an alliance dominated by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) along with other communist political stakeholder such as the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI,M), Communist Party of India (CPI), Revolutionary Socialist Party (India) (RSP), All India Forward Bloc (AIFB), Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI), Marxist Forward Bloc, Samajwadi Party, Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), Workers Party of India (WPI).

Table 1.2
SCs, STs and OBCs Children Enrolment (%) in Jalpaiguri District: 2011-12

SC, ST and OBC Enrolment	Primary	Upper Primary
% SC enrollment	40.1	32.7
% SC girls in SC enrolment	49.1	51.4
% ST enrollment	23.5	18.5
% ST girls in ST enrolment	49.8	51.4
% OBC enrollment	4	11.2
% OBC girls in OBC enrolment	48.1	50

Source: DISE District Report card: 2011-12

3.2.1 Jalpaiguri District: A Socio-economic, Cultural, Educational and Community Profile in Tribal Settings:

Jalpaiguri district is the largest and most backward district of the northern part of West Bengal, covering an area 6,245 sq. km (see Map 1.1). The district was established in 1869. The headquarters of the district are at Jalpaiguri town, which is also the divisional headquarter of north Bengal and has its special importance with respect to tourism, forests, hills, tea gardens, scenic beauty and is home to a wide variety of tribes. The principal tribal communities in the district are Oraon (51%), Munda (15%), Santal (11%), Lodha (7%), Mech (3.7%), Mahali (3.7%), Kora (1.57%), Rabha (1.16%), Toto and others¹⁸.

Selection of this particular study area is relevant because it is geographically a most backward rural area, dominated by vulnerable groups. So that all the SSK *Kendras* and government schools in the area are accessed by children from the most socio-economically vulnerable groups of the rural area. The snap shot of existing educational facilities in the district that have been shown in table 1.3.

Table 1.3
Jalpaiguri District School Report Card: 2011-12

DISTRICT ELEMENTARY EDUCATION REPORT CARD : 2011-12														
District	JALPAIGURI						State							West Bengal
Primary cycle	1-4	Upper primary cycle			5-8	Ratio of girls to boys enrolment (primary classes)								0.98
Data reported from	Number of blocks		17	Number of Clusters		196	Number of villages		1893	Number of schools		4567		
Basic Data, 2011														
Total population (in 000's)	3870	% 0 - 6 population		11.5	% Urban population		27.0	Sex ratio	954	Sex ratio 0-6		949		
Decadal growth rate	13.8		% SC pop. (2001)		36.7	% ST pop. (2001)		18.9	Overall literacy	73.8		Female literacy		66.7
Key Data: Elementary Education														
School category	Total schools*			Rural schools*			Total enrolment*			Rural enrolment*		Teachers*		
	Govt.	Private	Unrec.	Govt.	Private	Govt.	Private	Unrec.	Govt.	Private	Govt.	Private	Unrec.	
P only	3,178	513	71	2,980	436	349,782	53,862	5,066	324,846	45,631	12,135	2,813	165	
P+ UP	1	104	6	0	91	203	19,927	668	203	17,031	9	757	21	
P+UP+Sec/HS	4	39	3	0	30	2,091	16,895	751	903	12,851	54	339	32	
UP only	330	10	8	315	8	46,187	1,606	1,568	44,533	1,235	1,150	57	46	
UP + Sec/HS	290	3	7	242	2	253,078	647	4,333	222,097	376	7,447	26	150	
No response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Source: DISE District Report-2011-12

¹⁸ Based on Census Report-2001, Government of India.

Map 1.1
District Map of Jalpaiguri, West Bengal, India



Source: Maps of India, 2012¹⁹

3.3 Sample Size:

There are a total of 1089 SSK Kendras and 2029²⁰ government primary schools in the district whereas the Metalli block has 58 SSK Kendras and 69 government primary schools. Out of which 15 SSK Kendras were randomly selected along with 10 government primary schools to analyse the situation of the existing available services. The reason behind selecting 15 SSK Kendras out of 58 is to represent a good sample size covering 25% and 10 government schools covering 15% approximately for the research work. Since every village has a SSK Kendra, 15 villages were visited from where 10 Kendras were selected and focus group discussion with communities and *Sahayikas* were conducted to gain an insight of the function, condition and impacts of the SSK programme on the children. I have chosen government primary schools here in this observation to draw comparison between the functioning and resources available in both types of schools and their impact on children’s education especially of disadvantage groups.

3.4 Field Methods:

I have tried to construct a view of existing institutionalised primary school education²¹ facilities (both national and state-sponsored schemes such as SSM and SSK that cater to public primary education)²² along with their implementation mechanisms practices and processes. For the primary research, methods such as unstructured interviews, participatory observation and focus group discussions (FGD) with the key stakeholders such as the community members, *Sahayikas* and teachers have been applied.

Unstructured interviews were conducted with government officials to get insights of the policy framework, implementation mechanism and mind set of the officials about the programme. For this, I have separately visited the Block,

¹⁹ Source: <http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/westbengal/districts/jalpaiguri.htm#>

²⁰ DISE Data 2011-12

²¹ Here, Primary Education i.e. Class-I-IV Std. Because of the time constraints, finalizing of field study, and finishing of dissertation work within timeframe and huge complexities of education system, I thought it’s better to deal only with Primary Education of Government Primary Schools.

²² In this regards, I have chosen “Government Primary Schools” and “Sishu Shiksha Kendra”.

District and State level Bureaucratic Administrative Office related to Primary Education including Circle Inspector of School (SI-Primary), Samity Education officer (SEO), Block Development Officer (BDO), District Inspector of School (DI-Primary), District Nodal Officer (DNO), District Planning Officer (DPLO), District Project Officer (DPO), Assistant Coordinator Officer of Education (ACO), District Magistrate (DM), State Project Director (SPD-SSM), Joint Secretary of Panchayat and Rural Development Department (P and RD).

3.4.1 Methods of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with various Stake Holders:

In this process, I have had close interaction and observed the process of teaching-learning by the teachers, *Sahayikas* and students to get their views on the schemes, roles and responsibilities. I have also discussed with some of the local administrative members of the *panchayat*, village education committee (VEC) and parent teachers association (PTA) of both SSM and SSK schools and *Kendras* to get insights as to their roles and responsibilities. I have conducted a one-day workshop on RtE Act, 2009 with 80 *Sahayikas* (approx.) from Metalli Block on behalf of the Block Development Office. And it is here that they were divided into 10 groups to get further insights regarding the SSK *Kendras*, their programmes and functions and impact on children belonging to SCs, STs and OBCs.

3.5 An in-depth case-study: ‘The Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi’ (SSK) Programme: A Model of Alternative Primary Education

Background of the Programme:

In 1997-98 the Panchayat and Rural Development department of the state government of West Bengal decided to introduce an alternative elementary education system called ‘*Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi*’ (SSK: Child Education Work Plan) to reach every corner of the state, catering to the special needs of the children and providing a less costly, but qualitatively comparable education system. The programme planned to set up, with the help of *panchayati raj* bodies (under the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development, Government of West Bengal) about 1,000 Child Education Centres (CEC) i.e. Shishu Shiksha *Kendras*²³ wherever there were at least twenty children not having access to existing primary schools or where some special dispensation was required, not available in the formal primary schools.

Main Objectives of the Programme:

The *Kendras* consist of classes from standard 1-4²⁴ of primary school education and are situated in the most backward regions of rural West-Bengal. The SSK

²³ Shishu Shiksha *Kendra* i.e. child education ‘centre’ is commonly known as ‘SSK School’ in locally as well as in West Bengal context. Because it is little confusing with the abbreviation of the programme i.e. Shishu Shiksha Karmasuchi (SSK: Child Education Work Plan in English).

²⁴ From Std- 1-4 is known as Shishu Shiksha *Kendra* whereas from Std. 5-8 falls under Madhyamik Shiksha *Kendra* under Madhyamik Shiksha Karmasuchi (MSK).

'*Sahayikas*' (teachers)²⁵ are mostly educated rural women from those communities, who are employed on a contractual basis by decision of the Managing Committee of the *Kendra*²⁶. Other essential features of SSK are:

- SSK is a community based demand-driven programme that is why '*Kendras*' can be opened in villages without schools, or village with schools which have inadequate infrastructure (in terms of space) and / or inadequate human resources (in terms of teachers).
- The *Kendra* is opened at the initial initiatives of the community who owned and managed it.
- Funds are provided by the State government whereas the local *panchayat*²⁷ acts as a facilitator. UNICEF also provided financial support for capacity building measures and training programmes in education.
- The curriculum and syllabus are as prescribed by the West Bengal Board of Primary Education (WBBPE) and State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). Whereas, the textbooks used are as prescribed by Sarva Shiksha Mission (SSM) for the formal primary schools.
- Classrooms are run on the principle of "joyful learning" that is ensured by the RtE Act, 2009²⁸ later on.

3.6 Risks and Ethical Challenges Faced in the Field Study:

The main risk in my research is that I may be raising expectations that cannot be fulfilled. Apart from this, due to unwanted scheduling of the provisional elections in the state, the field work got postponed and interrupted by the party cadres who tried to influence me to show the SSK programme as a failure of the previous government and make it a political issue. This was followed by harassing questions as to who has asked me to conduct the particular research, who funded it and so on? However the major challenge faced was the two week long strike called by the Gorkha Mukti Morcha in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling District and the natural disaster of flood which hit Jalpaiguri during the time of my field work. All which I have been able to overcome and carry out my research work. All this information is put together in a detailed case study in the next Chapter where critically analysis of the policy perspectives on education, shortcomings in implementation mechanisms on the part of various government department and agencies is undertaken, along with monitoring of the roles of community and, last but not least, the impact of primary education on target beneficiaries ----the children from backward communities.

²⁵ The teacher of SSK programme is commonly known as 'Sahayikas' and it is a Bengali word that refers only to females, meaning 'the woman who provides education assistance to children'.

²⁶ 'Kendra' is the Bengali word that means "Centre" in English.

²⁷ In India the term 'Panchayat' refers to 'Institutions of Local-Self Government' under the Secular and Democratic Political System of Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI). The word 'Panchayat' means 'assembly' of the wise and respected elders chosen and accepted by the local community. The Panchayati Raj Institution came into force in India by the enactment of the Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992.

²⁸ As defined in Right to Education Act (RtE), 2009.

Chapter 4

Report from the Field: Research Findings and Analysis

4.1 Impacts of School and Teaching: Issues related to Practice and Development

From the previous chapter especially from the conceptual framework and literature review, it became clear that universal primary education for all is the key towards human development for any nation. To achieve such development, the government of India implemented several national and state programmes²⁹. But the West Bengal Government went a step ahead by implementing SSK to cater to the educational needs of the geographically and educationally backward communities. The number of SSK *Kendras* all across the State has increased along with enrolment rates. For example, in 2011-12, there were 16,108 SSKs with 46,627 *Sabayikas* and the total number of learners in classes I-IV was 1369913 (PBSSM Annual Report, 2011-12). But the issue of accessing quality primary education for human development remains. Even the SSK programme, which has the potential, fails to achieve this goal. For example, 565 SSKs are till now running in non-rain free buildings and 388 have no building at all. 587 SSKs do not have a drinking water source of their own and in 5525 SSKs there is no toilet. There are 200 SSK buildings which are under-constructed along with proportionately less classrooms (PBSSM Annual Report, 2012). As elaborated in the Introduction, here quality refers to *adequate, appropriate* and *effective* primary education which includes factors such as teacher-training, qualification and knowledge, medium of instruction, curriculum and practicality of the national schemes and so on. Without which, children from backward communities are denied adequate and appropriate primary education. In the field findings, I focus on those quality aspects of education by closely monitoring the SSK *Kendras* along with a few other govt. primary schools and analyse the *deprivation* and *discrimination* faced by the geographically backward communities. The SSK programme is an alternative primary education scheme which has the potential to address and fulfil the education needs of those communities (P and RD, 1997; Saikh, 2010). Along with it, monitoring of government primary schools has been done to critically analyse the denial and deprivation aspect of education through facilities available in both sets of schools. Though quality aspects of primary education have many components based upon the RtE Act, for this paper I have chosen four components which are crucial.

4.1.1 Medium of Instruction: Factor of Language

Language is a medium of communication and hence education should be imparted in the mother tongue that facilitates better understanding of learners, richer classroom inter-action, greater participation of learners, and yield better

²⁹ Apart from SSM in West Bengal State, there are several schemes such as SSK, MDM, School Uniform, and Free Text Book etc. schemes are running to support and strengthening the Primary School Education.

learning outcomes (NCETR, 2006). In spite of being ethnically and linguistically diverse, the Bengali language is still predominantly used as the medium of instruction in schools in West Bengal. Whereas 39.5% (approx.) of the enrolled children in primary schools and Kendras are from SCs, STs and OBCs communities, who are non-Bengali speaker, getting denied from access to quality primary education every day (NUEPA, 2013). In the Jalpaiguri district the medium of instruction in the schools including the SSK *Kendras* is mainly Bengali, Hindi, English and to some extent Nepali. Whereas in the SSK *Kendras*, a majority of the children comes from the SCs, STs and OBCs communities for whom the mother tongue is their different tribal languages and not Bengali, Hindi or Nepali. Even the text books that have been provided are in Bengali or Hindi. Therefore these children are acquiring primary education and learning in an alien language and they fail to develop their understanding and improve learning abilities (see Table 1.2). They are also unable to participate in classroom interactions with the *Sahayikas* and other Bengali, Hindi or Nepali speaking fellows (Chattopadhyay and Durdhawale, 2009). My discussions with the *Sahayikas* revealed that they are trained in teaching the curriculum in Bengali or Hindi and their view was that the children understand the medium of instruction.

“These children stay in and around and communicate with other communities. So they understand their lessons taught in class using Bengali, Hindi or Nepali?” (From an FGD, July, 2013, Jalpaiguri, WB).

It is a form of discrimination if SCs, STs and OBCs cannot secure their basic right of quality primary education in their own mother tongue. They are also deprived of a curriculum that has relevance to the surroundings in which they live and this impairs their improved learning outcomes and skills development. All these are in violation of the laws prescribed in the National Policy of Education (1986), the UNESCO Report on ‘EFA’, the Salamanca Statement and RtE. However discussion with government officials indicated that, at present there is no system to translate and provide curriculum and text books in tribal languages and also there is a shortage of resources within the department to initiate such steps. All this constitutes a rejection of the entire concept of right-based approach in education and its inclusive strategy. Moreover, it restricts their opportunity for self-development and reproduces the societal inequality that still exists in the education system (Scrase, 1993; PROBE, 1999; Majumdar and Mooij, 2011). This can be seen from the deprivation of SCs, STs and OBCs from accessing quality primary education in the states of WB, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and so on (Chattopadhyay and Durdhawale, 2009; Pacha, 2012). However when I spoke to the children (with help of some *Sahayikas* those who can speak tribal language and belongs to ST community) in an interactive way and asked them about basic facts in relation to their surrounding in their mother tongue, I found that:

“All the children are not only keen to reply but all replied that have been asked correctly” (From own Observation, Aug, 2013, Jalpaiguri).

There is also the issue of human capabilities for development which could be increased by accessing the opportunities (Sen, 1990). However mere providing of schools will not increase individual capabilities. It is the fulfilling

of the basic rights within education such as access to education in mother tongue and cultural relevance in the curriculum that will increase the understanding and skills of the individual (Saito, 2003). It is then only that education would be provided to all without any discrimination and would be able to reduce the existing societal inequality and inequality in education system. Therefor in Appendix 1 and 2 it has been clearly shown that the rate of transition of children from Standard I to II is maximum whereas there is a gap in the transition from Standard-V to VI, and this might be the language barrier in Jalpaiguri district. Since it reduces the learning outcomes of children and denied them the scope for developing their capacity for further education (DISE, 2012-13).

4.1.2 Teacher Training: Pedagogy for Innovative Teaching

Teacher qualification, training and motivation play a vital role in influencing improved learning abilities and overall development of children especially of the educationally backward communities. Pedagogy methods are the most important component. As we know, training is important for skills development and understanding of the people for quality and productivity of labour (NCF, 1986; Jha, 2002). That is why; in the field of primary education India emphasizes and spends a budget on teacher-training (MHRD, 2001). These training facilities have been immensely increased in the last ten years after SSA, by the MHRD, GoI.

In government primary schools, teaching is provided by regular and para-teachers. Unlike regular teachers, in government schools who have permanent tenure, para-teachers are recruited on a contractual basis for a fixed term. Para-teachers can be hired for regular schools or for alternative schools³⁰. Initially the government's idea was that if para-teachers were recruited for regular schools, they would assist the regular teachers rather than teach themselves independently. But in most cases, they function as normal teachers. Kumar et al. and others also argue that recruitment of para-teachers is cost-effective and they could be appointed at one-fourth to one-fifth salary of the regular teachers (Kumar et al., 2001; Mehrotra and Buckland 2001; Duthilleul, 2005, Pandey, 2006; Narayan and Mooij, 2010). Narayan and Mooij (2010) also are of the view that since para-teachers are recruited from the community, this itself increased the accountability of both the teachers in better providing their services with less absenteeism and also of the communities to monitor the proper functioning of the education programme. That is why, in 2005-06 half a million para-teachers were appointed across 35 states, of which 93% were working in rural areas and 66% were posted in primary schools (NUEPA, 2007; Narayan and Mooij, 2010) The State Government of West Bengal in 1997 adopted the strategy to recruit para-teachers for the alternate SSK programme to provide innovative quality primary education. The absentee rate among para-teachers is 43% lower in Kendras than teachers in regular govt. primary schools (Pratichi Trust Report, 2002). However the credibility and reliability for innovative teaching remains a question in schools especially in SSK Kendras, since to provide innovative teaching and impart quality primary education, the teacher's qualification do play a vital role (Jha, 2002). For regular

³⁰ For e.g. schools set up by SSA, State specific primary school programme (SSK in WB), schools run by NGOs, or other programmes for specific groups, etc.

teachers the minimum qualification has to be a bachelor degree as per the National Curriculum Framework, 2005 guidelines. The qualification of the Sahayikas ranges between Standard 8-12 (DISE, 2010). Non-recruitment of regular teachers for this programme constitutes class discrimination. Followed by this discrimination, is the disparity in percentage of trained regular teachers and para teachers. Though the percentage of trained regular teacher in the state is 57.6% which itself is too less to provide innovative quality education to all the children enrolled under primary schools. However if we see the percentage of trained para teacher, the figure is alarming since only 19.6% are trained. This it creates a sense of societal inequality within the education system in West Bengal today (State Report card, NUEPA, 2011-12).

The *Sahayikas* do not receive adequate training to improve their understanding and skills to provide innovative joyful teaching and learning as prescribed in the RtE Act, 2009. The quality of teaching and pedagogy methods for innovative teaching has not improved in India. This has been reflected in various reports and studies such as CAG, ASER and PAISA. For example, CAG Report showed that in Andhra Pradesh across six districts it was found that the para-teachers were given only three to seven days of training instead of the 30 days that they are entitled to get (CAG Report, 2006) thus affecting their quality of teaching. Similar issue of poor quality teaching has been reported in the alternative schools in Madhya Pradesh (Leclercq, 2002; Narayan and Mooij, 2010). This raises the question as to how the in-service training of the para-teachers could be developed to improve innovative skills of teaching and who will monitor how much quality primary education is being provided (Govinda and Josephine 2004; Narayan and Mooij, 2010). The answer to which is, increasing the accountability of the government official along with, proper allocation and utilization of the available resources (Jha et al. 2013).

However in practice, there is hardly any framework for, or practice of, performance appraisal and most para-teachers get their contracts renewed in India (Duthilleul, 2005). Similarly in the case of the SSK *Sahayikas* in West Bengal, very limited training is provided to them for developing and strengthening their skills and understanding. *“Since the P and RD do not have any such training mechanism for primary education which act as a barrier for the social and skills development of the Sahayikas. Except in 2010 when SSM facilitated training for the Sahayikas”* (From interviews conducted in August, 2013).

Since the children of SCs, STs, and OBCs, residing in the geographically remote region, are mostly first-generation learners, they require innovative and activity-based learning to improve their understanding and learning outcomes (MHRD, 1986; UNESCO, 1990; RtE Act, 2009). Low wages or incentives and job insecurity can be perceived as unfair and may force para-teachers to pay more concentration saving their jobs rather than focusing on providing primary education (Sharma, 1999; Leclercq, 2002; Bennell, 2004; Govinda and Josephine 2004; Kremer et.al, 2004). Apart from this, the socio-political presence influences decision making and *Sahayikas'* recruitment for SSK which is also affecting the motivation level and efforts of the *Sahayikas*.

‘...condition they are under has affected their motivation level who now concentrate more on protecting their contractual job in the change of political party, rather than on providing innovative and quality primary education to the children’ (From an FGD, July, 2013, Jalpaiguri, WB).

‘... we have been dedicated in our profession and took pride in it. However with passage of time that practice has faded away since we are recognised as ‘Sabayikas’ and not as ‘Teachers’. Our efforts have not been credited or even recognised as par with the teachers of government primary schools both by the people as well as by the government school teacher. We are denied social recognition and moreover our jobs are contractual and wages are very low. And inspite of our age we are still continuing teaching.’ (From an FGD, July 2013, Jalpaiguri, WB).

Again it has been argue by various scholars that creation of a separate cadre of para-teachers has led to a diversification and demoralizing impact on the teacher’s status and teaching (NCTE 2006: p.19; PROBE,1999, Göttemann-Duret, 2000; Narayan and Mooij, 2010). Since *Sabayikas* are low paid, they do not have any identity and are looked down upon by the government school teachers and the community, which further reduces their motivation to provide effective education. Here there is a reflection of societal inequality within the primary education system represented through class discrimination of the *Sabayikas*. Mehrotra and Buckland (2001) suggest that for the scheme to work well, a more substantial investment would be needed for providing training and guidance.

4.1.3 Issues of Accountability

In Mehta’s point of view, ‘accountability is often defined as the ability of one actor to demand an explanation of another actor for its actions and reward or punish the actor on the basis of its performance or its explanation’ (Mehta, 2005). The priorities and actions depend on organised public demand, and other aspects of a broad political process in which cooperative action plays a crucial role in a democratic society (Dreze and Sen, 1996, 2000). But this also depends on the ‘the level of education in the community, the accountability of government institutions, and the legal framework of civic association’ (Dreze and Sen, 1996, 2000). Aiyar et.al (2010) raise the same issue: ‘the increasing number of public calls for strengthening central and state government oversight of policy implementation and also suggests a strengthening of political will to improve the incentives to deliver services’. Although there is allocation and expenditure for public services regulated by central and state governments in India, but the ongoing failure of accountability by government institutions for providing adequate and appropriate services in the public sector brings denial and deprivation especially for the socio-economically deprived communities. Aiyar et.al (2010) pointed out: ‘accountability failure is at the heart of this outcome failure.

In the field of primary education in India, both central and state governments believe that every child should be in school. For that notion the goal of universal schooling, access and enrolment has been almost met through SSA and RtE in India. But the real challenge now lies in shifting its focus from schooling to learning (PAISA, 2011). The SSA Framework stresses: ‘the need

for the creation of capacity within the education system and the school for addressing the diversified learning needs of different groups of children who are now in the school system' (Review Report, MHRD, 2011). The PAISA team argue: 'simply ensuring that children are in schools cannot be the ultimate goal. Education is not about "years of schooling completed" but the "value added" as a result of spending time in school and how to take the critical step beyond schooling that will lead us to the ultimate goal of education' (PAISA, 2011). Although India's elementary education budget has increased from 68,710 - 97,255 crore in FY-2007-08 (Kapur, 2011), but the services that need to be present in schools under RtE norms to generate knowledge and practice and reflect them in their daily life by the children especially from social-economic and educationally backward communities and influence their family and communities are still missing. Much of the preoccupation of government is on ensuring that RtE entitlements are 'delivered' to India's children.

Mid-day-Meal (MDM):

Mid-day-Meal (MDM)³¹ is the large-scale scheme introduced by the MHRD, GoI in 1995³² to provide a nutritious meal to all children, coming from all communities, in all government schools, to overcome the challenge of malnutrition among children and increase schools retention rates. There is no doubt that MDM is served in every school visited. The responsibility to cook the MDM has been handed over to the Self-help Groups (SHGs) and teachers are only responsible to monitor the distribution of food among the children. However, real questions remain about the quality of the food being served. Since no adequate training is provided by the govt. to increase the capacity and effective utilization of limited resources, the SHG's have not been made accountable for providing quality, nutritious meal and adopting of hygienic method of cooking. (Review Mission Report, MHRD, 2011).

"...in almost all the visited government primary schools and SSK Kendras I was also served the MDM along with the children. And the truth is the food being served is blunt and non-edible by anyone since the quality of food grains is so inferior" (From Observation, July-August, 2013, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal).

Some officials and government teachers justified the poor quality of food being served, and I quote: *"...these children are coming from economically very poor families, where they hardly get one square meal a day. At least in schools they get something to eat which is better than starvation"* (From an interview, July, 2013, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal). In further discussion with the officials on this issue, they replied that *"...per unit allotment of children for providing food is decided by policy makers and has*

³¹ With a view to enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children, the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) was launched as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme on 15th August 1995. In 2001 MDMS became a cooked Mid-day-Meal Scheme under which every child in every Government and Government aided primary school was to be served a prepared Mid-day-Meal with a minimum content of 300 calories of energy and 8-12 gram protein per day for a minimum of 200 days. The Scheme was further extended in 2002 to cover not only children studying in Government, Government aided and local body schools, but also children studying in Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternative & Innovative Education (AIE) centres.

³² Please visit: <http://mhrd.gov.in/middaymeal>

not been changed over time with increase of prices of other food items. So, every school has to adjust to that stipulated amount” (From an interview, Aug, 2013, Kolkata, WB; Pratichi Trust, 2010). Lack of accountability in terms of resources and willingness of the government officials has led the MDM scheme to its present state (Aiyar et al., 2010; Jha, 2013). In case of the SSK *Kendras*, communities’ participation in monitoring the scheme is neglected and that further degrades it (Mehta, 2005). Since they come from a very poor economic background they fail to afford a meagre meal and here MDM plays a vital part of providing food to the children even if the food is poor and contains inadequate nutrition (Khera, 2006; Garg and Mandal, 2013). Coupled with this is the issue of hygienic environment of consuming the meal by children which is again ignored. Children are consuming food with dirty hands and in plates by sitting on the unclean floors of the school.

Drinking Water Facilities in School:

According to State Report Card (NUEPA, 2013), it shows that there has been an increased in drinking water facilities in primary schools, from 95.4% to 97.4% in the FY-10-11 to 11-12. Along with the provision of adequate and clean drinking water facilities provided in schools (Review Report, MHRD, 2011). However, in almost all the schools visited, availability of quality drinking water is a major concern and an alarming issue. Provision for drinking water facilities in schools is only limited to having a tube well or dug well in rural India (ASER, 2012). The condition of the SSK *Kendras* is more appalling since most of them are located in the geographically remote and hilly areas of the Jalpaiguri region where water scarcity especially in the summer is a major issue. However the management of quality control of water within the government bodies is not effective. Though *“the SSK Kendras do have tube well or dug well however either some are non-functional or for the rest water that is pumped out is of poor quality and unsafe for drinking”* (Observation from the Field, Aug, 2013, Jalpaiguri). Again, drinking water is a necessity especially in these hilly areas, the SSM and P and RD Dept. WB Govt are spending huge amounts of money to provide water facilities in schools and communities. However none of the departments are concerned about monitoring the quality of water or non-availability of water from those sources. Again lack of accountability in terms of resources and willingness, of the government officials is also a major age old concern (Aiyar et.al, 2010; Jha 2013). That not only affects the children but also the communities who are denied and deprived from their right to safe drinking water, right to life and most importantly right to self-development. Also due to non-availability of water in schools the children fail to adopt good practices of drinking safe and clean water and this reflects back in the community.

Condition of Toilets in Schools:

In all the visited SSK *Kendras* and government schools, there is a physical toilet structure. However, related facilities such as the child-friendly toilet structure, usability, accessibility, sustainability and presence of clean water for physical use are absent in almost every government primary schools and especially in SSK *Kendras*. A very astonishing revelation that has taken place is that all the

toilets in most schools have been found to be locked (ASER various years; PAISA, 2010, 2011). According to State Report card (NUEPA, 2013) shows that percentage of girls' toilets has drastically decreased from 89.4% to 49.8% compare with the boys toilet which has immensely increased to 28.1% to 85.8% in the FY 10-11 to 11-12. Therefore, inspite of the yearly rapid increase in the number of toilets that is taking place in schools provided by the SSM, TSC and the P and RD Dept. (ASER, 2012). How far the toilets have been used remains a question! Although MHRD Report (2011) states: 'Sanitation in the schools must be ensured either directly or through convergence with other scheme or community support. However in the area of sanitation and use of toilets facility leaves much scope for improvement. While all school visited had separate toilets for boys and girls, cleanliness and availability of water is an issue. The girls' toilets were found very filthy and almost unusable in Birbhum?.

The children studying in the SSK *Kendras* come from most socio-economically, educationally and geographically backward and deprived sections, where households do not have any toilet and the communities do not have any practice of hygiene. Therefore, the concept of using toilets, good practices of hygiene and its impact on their own health is something unknown to them. However in this case also the government official's accountability is limited to provide the physical structure of toilets and not with its usability and accessibility. This violates not the right to access quality primary education but also the individual rights of sanitation and hygiene especially of the SCs, STs and OBCs children.

It is very important not to have any new policies. Rather the focus should be to revise the existing one by the policy maker, so that the available resources could be effectively utilised in implementing the programmes and to develop a monitoring mechanism, that will assess the quality of the programme and ensure accountability of government officials, teachers and more importantly of the community (Mehta, 2005; PAISA, 2011) in fulfilling the goals of EFA.

4.1.4 Right to Education (RtE) Act, 2009: Understanding and Practice

In the RtE Act under Chapter V of 'curriculum and completion of elementary education', Art 29 (2) (f) provides that the academic authority while preparing the curriculum must take into consideration that '*medium of instruction shall, as far as practicable, be in the child's mother tongue*' (RtE Act, 2009). The reason for mentioning such provision is just to ensure better understanding and also having an environment where children could learn without any stress and anxiety; attaining both mental and physical development. However the real scenario is something very different. As mentioned earlier, it was found that the medium of teaching in the SSKs is either Bengali, Hindi and Nepali and the education department of the state at present do not have the provision to initiate the step to translate the text books into the mother tongue of the SCs, STs and OBCs residing in the region and across the State.

On the behalf of the Block Development Office, I was asked to give a one day workshop on RtE Act, 2009 to the Sahayikas. It is from this workshop session that I observed, the *Sahayikas* do not have a clear understanding either of the SSK programme or of RtE Act. For them RtE Act only means, and I quote them: “*Now every child should be given free primary education. RtE means Prathamik Shiksher Adhikar’ in Bengali (right for primary education)*” (From an FGD, July, 2013, Jalpaiguri, WB). But why the government has introduced such Act, why it has been made free and compulsory and other in-depth understanding of the Act is unknown to them and this is because inadequate training is provided to them by both central and local authorities who under Art 7(6) (b) and 9(j) of RtE act are entrusted with having to ‘*develop and enforce standards of training for teachers’ and ‘provide training facilities for teachers’*. The teachers/*Sahayikas* are the main actors responsible for ensuring and implementing the act and if they remain unaware of the norms and proper understanding of the act; then there will continue to exist a gap between the laws mentioned in the act and its practice in reality.

Initially when the SSK programme was launched, *Sahayikas* were selected very easily without paying much attention to their educational background. However with the change in the political scenario in the state, the new government shows limited concern and interest in the SSK programme, and has no initiative or strategy of its own to improve the quality of the *Sahayikas*, so that the quality of teaching could be enhanced. That is why the *Sahayikas* are more concerned with securing their job rather than on acquiring knowledge and understanding of the new Act and its norms to practice them in their service. Some previous researchers and my own observation reveal that the *Sahayikas* have more motivational power than the teachers of the government primary schools (UNICEF, 2006; Pratichi Trust, 2006; Saikh, 2010).

Overall analysis of the field findings and observation leads us to conclude that there are issues such as lack of accountability of the stakeholders towards the primary education needs of the children, limited scope of revision of education policies especially the SSK programme and RtE Act to make it more relevant to the existing reality of the states and differences in the law mentioned and practice of RtE. All these factors are undoubtedly denying and depriving children, especially SCs, STs and OBCs from access to effective quality primary education and from the scope for self-development.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

The Government of India has adopted universal primary education as a strategy to reduce social inequalities and alleviate poverty under ever-growing discrimination based upon class and caste. However, despite creating legal obligations regarding educational rights for children, especially from historically deprived and educationally backward communities, realization of such rights remains a distant dream. That is serious threat to building up their capacities and capabilities for further career endeavour to compete privilege mainstream population.

In this paper, I have presented an in-depth case study of the SSK programme of Government of West Bengal which not only caters to the primary educational needs of the SCs, STs and OBCs communities but also plays a vital role to fulfil the notion of EfA in Jalpaiguri district of WB. There have been quantitative achievements of school infrastructure, teachers; engagement, enrolment and so on for strengthening the educational system at primary level. However, the significance of education and its outcome that boosts self-development is still under-appreciated by all involved. Due to limitations in the implementation of RtE (2010) the government is still unable to reduce the inequalities in the education system. Although supportive *affirmative action* is already being taken by both state and central governments through various schemes, still lots of children are denied access to adequate and effective quality primary education especially those belonging to SCs, STs and OBCs communities in India. It is shame that till now disparity exists between society, school system, rural and urban settings, from different states where most of the victims are from disadvantaged groups such as children, especially from rural SCs, STs and OBCs.

No mechanism was implemented to provide effective pedagogy methods, curriculum, and teachers training. Also the notion of human capability approach is not justified if the available existing facilities are not adequate. In Sen's (1987) point of view: 'a functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve'. If so, the existing inequality and disparity restricts access to adequate facilities which could enhance the child's ability for his/her development. Education can play a vital role to develop human capacity and capability. But if adequate access to effective primary education is denied then both mental and physical development get restricted. Here the need for an integrated educational policy is require which will converge all existing programs. To maintain uniformity and parity within the education system and provide appropriate and effective quality primary education which fulfil the goal of EfA.

Like any other state of India, WB has diversity in terms of ethnicity and language, and have SCs, STs and OBCs populations residing in several regions including Jalpaiguri. They speak their own mother tongue which is completely different from the regional language of Bengali or the national language of Hindi. Nevertheless, in government primary schools and SSK *Kendras* the medium of instruction and text books curriculum are based upon Bengali or Hindi and English as prescribed by SSM. The SSK *Kendras*' school-going population is mostly from SCs, STs and OBCs communities of non-Bengali or

Hindi speakers. This is a challenge for the children since they have limited understanding of curriculum and what is being taught in class. That not only restricts them to enjoy the basic and fundamental rights, but also contradict the RtE norms. It is not only the violation of a child rights to education, but also a violation of all human rights contained in the UDHR. It brings discrimination against the child's interest and restricts them to express their views that are legally ensured by the UN and RtE. In the long run, the child has lost her/his right to life, survival and development. Every day a large number of children belonging to SCs, STs and OBCs communities are forcefully pushed backward by the unequal system of education. This is evident from their poor academic performance and lower literacy and numeracy rates as shown in the ASER Reports from 2005 to 2012 as compared to their Bengali and Hindi-speaking fellow mates studying in government schools and also in the SSK *Kendras*. If we observe the DISE data (2011-12), the enrolment rate is huge at primary level, but when it comes to higher or further study, the percentage shows negative direction (see appendix 1 and 2). The proper mechanisms is unavailable within the respective government departments to translate the text books or to provide training to the teachers in different mother tongues; further discriminating against children from SCs, STs and OBCs and restricting their access to the benefits of primary education. The PAISA (2012) Study on governance accountability shows that the government budget for resource allocation to primary education, especially on pedagogy and training is increasing rapidly over the last few years. Nevertheless, the lack of access remains unabated. The norms set-forth in the UNESCO Report on EFA (1990) followed by The Salamanca Statement (1994) and the RtE Act (2009) remain violated. The reality is that the RtE is an Act on paper only and not in practice. This proves that the legacy of societal inequalities within the primary education system in India continues.

Furthermore, looking at the content of the curriculum, it has no relevance to the surrounding of these backward children who learn things which they cannot relate to rather than what they need to know. This resulting under-development of their understanding and learning capacities pushes them further away from the essence of primary education. This misrepresents the RtE Act (2009) which clearly mentions that curriculum should have relevance to the surroundings that will improve the learning ability among the children, especially those coming from backward communities, so that their skills and capabilities for self-development will be enhanced through innovative pedagogy methods. Not only are the children discriminated in accessing primary education, the *Sahayikas* also face certain challenges in carrying out their services with the limited skills development and capacity building training they receive. Therefore, this directs towards adaptation of the new pedagogy methods that will ensure innovative teaching skills. At the same time frequent awareness campaign by both government and non-governmental agencies should initiate to aware community on the importance of primary education.

The State government and education department are expected to be law-abiding under RtE, 2009. Yet they fail to manage the programme effectively and efficiently. On the other hand, the *Sahayikas* who inspite of being para-teachers, provide immense and equal service like the teachers of the government primary schools. Still they are called as '*Sahayikas*' and not 'Teachers' and are looked down upon by the teachers of government schools

and also by the community members and represent practice of class structure within the education system in India. This is further hindering the development of primary education and through it those who are accessing it especially the children coming from SCs, STs and OBCs communities suffer immensely.

The issue of discrimination and inequality existing in primary education system further triggers lack of accountability among the government officials as well as the community too. To ensure and fulfil the proper implementation of accessible primary education by all without any discrimination, the GoI runs several supportive schemes such as MDM, providing drinking water and toilet facilities in schools to generate and develop practice of health and hygiene by the children, so that there could be an increased retention rate in the school and the children could develop good practices from schools and reflect them back to community. However in all the three schemes mentioned above, there has only been increase in the physical numbers in achievements that are reflected in DISE data rather than any focus on quality aspects and outcomes of the schemes. The MDM scheme in recent times has been extended to the SHG from teachers to maintain accountability by engaging the community. However, limited and stipulated budget allocation per child to run the scheme increases the inefficiency of the program. As a result the scheme is running in an appalling condition especially in the SSK *Kendras* where the children's only chance of getting nutritious meal is denied, since they are coming from socio-economically backward communities who cannot afford to have nutritious food. Similarly in the case of drinking water facilities, provision of tube well or dug well is there in all the schools. However in most cases either there is poor quality of water or scarcity of water that brings denial of access to safe drinking water which, in turn results in the poor health condition of the children.

The role of inclusive primary education for all is also to develop and generate the knowledge and practice of good health and hygiene habits among children especially of SCs, STs and OBCs. However there are no such provisions available in SSK *Kendras*. This lack not only restricts certain groups of people from individual wellbeing and human capacity but also delays the overall societal development. Therefore to increase accountability on the parts of government officials, teachers and communities, workshops, training and strong monitoring mechanism on the health and hygiene issues need to be provided by the NGOs and government itself.

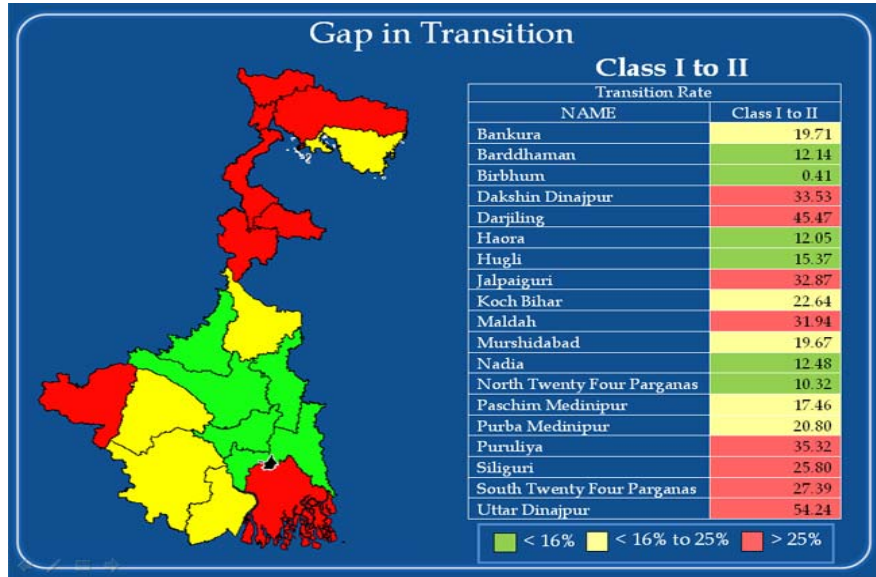
Value added inclusive primary education could bring socio-economic, cultural and educational change and maintain parity in an equal society. Alternative primary education has the potentiality to cater to the education needs of the backward communities of the SCs, STs and OBCs and bridge the gap between their education deprivation and existing opportunities under the fold of primary education. However with the existing challenges that the programme faces due to lack of uniformity in the education system of the state and nation along with lack of accountability, it is significantly failing to do so. The programme is being run in a neglected manner that is affecting the children's ability to seek appropriate and effective quality primary education. Neither their learning capacities are improving nor are their skills and abilities developing that would have helped them to opt for further education or socio-economic development opportunities. This contradicts the concept of the human capabilities approach. Exercising freedom requires the basic right to

education for all through basic facilities that deliver appropriate and effective primary education for all without any discrimination or deprivation. To ensure this right, the government both state and national should strengthen and incorporate the alternative primary education system into mainstream schooling, so that children from the backward communities are not deprived from acquiring appropriate and effective quality primary education for their self-development.

Appendices

Appendix 1

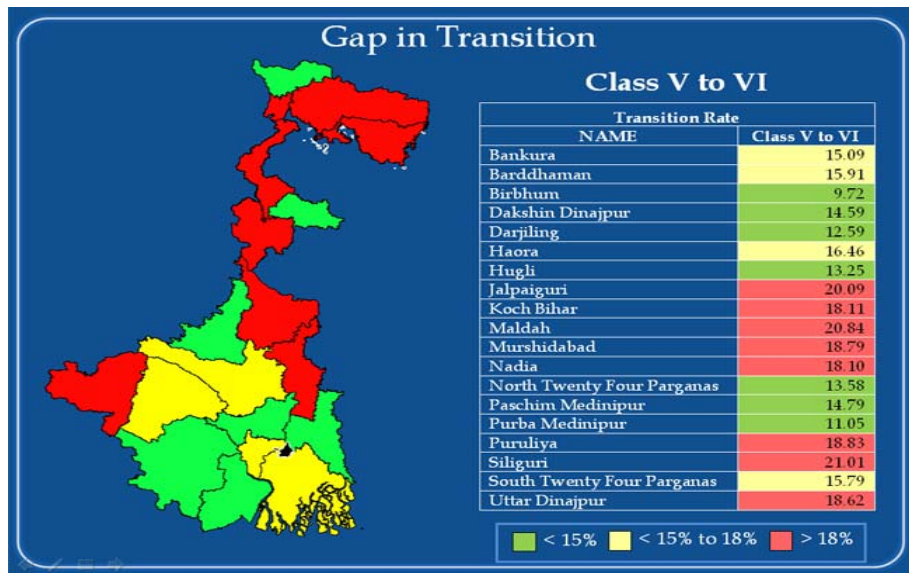
Gap in Transition: Class I-II at Primary Level, Jalpaiguri District in West Bengal, 2012-13



Source: DISE Data, 2012-13

Appendix 2

Gap in Transition: Class V-VI at Upper Primary Level, Jalpaiguri District in West Bengal, 2012-13



Source: DISE Data, 2012-13

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