

# GUEST COLUMN

## The Second Wave of Alienation from State Schools

A.K. Jalaluddin



While a large section of our marginalized population kept themselves away from the primary schools till the late seventies due to abject poverty or near destitution and lack of motivation, the scene is visibly different since the early nineties. Now, the poorest of the poor also see the relevance of basic education and are prepared to invest in the education of their children. This is because of their enhanced social awareness of the opportunities that education can provide in improving their conditions of living. This awareness has also made them critical of the value that a school can and should add to their children's learning through the process of schooling.

However, in the meantime, the growing middle class has been abandoning the public delivery system of education due to the latter's failure to respond to their changing perception of the quality of education and to become accountable for the delivery of quality education. Following their footsteps, the marginalized sections are also deserting the state schools and joining low fee charging private schools. I am personally aware of the fact that hundreds of state-run primary schools are being closed down in our metropolitan cities and even in other towns. This second wave of alienation, of a growing section of the population, from the state schools is silently pushing the public delivery of education to a crisis point, about which nobody, not even the educational planners, policy researchers and independent educational thinkers, are prepared to speak.

For a fairly long time, I have been privy to the inner functioning of the education departments in the states and center, and also to the initiatives in national, international and UN bodies responsible for mobilizing resources and launching various educational intervention programmes and projects. I can vouch, how embarrassed most of the above organizational leaders could be when we brought to their notice the gap between their public postures about the so-



called successes of their interventions and the problems of gross failure in the field, through numerous internal administrative and financial audit reports focusing on

endemic administrative and financial malpractices, indiscipline and misreporting. In such situations, the most sincere amongst them, including ministers, top political party leaders and senior bureaucrats, would tend to confide in closed doors how they themselves were frustrated with their failure in reaching out to the poor due to widespread corrupt and unethical practices, politicization of the system, irresponsible trade unionism and innumerable litigations against the education department due to the arbitrary and ad hoc nature of the departmental decision-making process. These closed-door discussions often end with blame-game and profound expression of personal integrity, and helplessness. The more pragmatic among the organizational leaders feel that the present system could not be repaired through any revision of norms or training. The wiser among them see this systemic dysfunction and chaos as symptomatic of the growing ineffectiveness of the traditional hierarchical, top-down, authoritarian models of governance of education, and at the same time indicative of wider opportunities for adopting new forward-looking participatory organizational design and management systems. Traditional school effectiveness research (SER) generally fails to capture these dynamics. Hence there is an attempt in SER to define equality and equity in education, drawing upon notions of social justice and social inclusion. This concern has been brought in focus through the establishment of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) to bring together researchers, practitioners and policy makers to co-construct knowledge about the study and processes of improving schools and making them effective in different international contexts where equity considerations have remained a key focus of many studies. Most recent studies conducted in US and UK now point to the existence of significant school and classroom effects, while acknowledging the influence of student background.



When the government-funded universities and research institutes in India and most other developing countries fail to explore the crux of the problems of failure of these countries



to stand by their national and international commitments to universalize quality education for all, international forums and UN bodies and research institutes happen to come out openly to expose these problems of failure.

The Drafting Committee of the World Education Forum had to record in its April 2000 session at Dakar: "Corruption is a major drain on the effective use of resources for education and should be drastically curbed." The United Nations Convention against Corruption held at the General Assembly, N.Y., in November 2003, adopted Kofi Annan's statement: "Corruption hurts the poor disproportionately by diverting funds intended for development, undermining a government's ability to provide basic services, feeding inequality and injustice and discouraging foreign investment and aid." The former Director of the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), Paris, Jacques Hallak and his co-author Muriel Poisson had to dig out hundreds of skeletons to produce a path-breaking overview of the field under the title: *Ethics and Corruption in Education: An Overview* (2005).

The IIEP paper, which happens to be the most quoted paper in recent years on the need for drastic reform of education systems, summarizes the situation, as follows: "In a context of budget austerity and pressure on international flows of funds, there is a clear demand for more efficiency in the use of public resources. Recent surveys suggest that leakage of funds from ministries of education to schools represent more than 80% of the total sums allocated (non-salary expenditures) in some countries; bribes and payoffs in teacher recruitment and promotion tend to lower the quality of public school teachers; and illegal payments for school entrance and other hidden costs help explain low school enrolment and high drop-out rates. The paper argues that the problems posed by corruption in education have been neglected for too long."

The most recent (2007) studies conducted by UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris, under the initiative of its present Director, Mark Bray, brings out the comparative perspectives on patterns and implications of private supplementary tutoring as an emerging huge industry in much of Asia and a fast growing one in Africa, Europe and North America. Private tutoring has a long history in both western and eastern societies. In recent decades, however, it

has greatly increased in scale and has become a major phenomenon and is driven by a competitive climate and strong belief in the value of education for social and economic advancement. However, tutoring also widens the gaps between the rich and the poor and also between urban and rural areas. Tutoring can also create dissonance with lessons in mainstream classes and can contribute to fatigue of both pupils and teachers. However, when tutoring services are provided by the state under the overall guidance of specialists and local schools, such services can address the dual issues of quality and equity, as it has been shown by Singapore to help the Malay community to catch up with the Chinese and Indian communities in education performance in that country.

Amartya Sen, in his 2001 Protichi Report lamented: "There is perhaps no better indicator of the under-performance of primary schools than the use of private tuition on which most students, whoever can afford it, seem to rely. The role of private tuition, as filler of serious gaps, is brought out by a comparison of achievement, which we were able to make. We examined 34 children from classes 3 and 4 in primary school, of whom 20 took private tuition and 14 did not. The percentage of children who could write their names proved to be 80 percent for those taking tuition, whereas the ratio was only 7 percent for those who did not have the benefit of being privately tutored. We may well ask: what, then, do they learn in school?"

An ethnographic study, conducted jointly by BRAC and Plan International (Bangladesh) in four government primary schools in Bangladesh in 2007, revealed that the classroom processes are designed in such a way that the teachers have just the time to give learning tasks to the students in the school and, according to the teachers, it is the responsibility of the students to learn the same at home. "The whole process evokes private tuition so that the children get support at home". It is noted, "both the children and their parents consider private tuition as a prerequisite for good results in the examination".



Another unpublished study, conducted by the Research Cell, West Bengal District Primary Education Programme (WBDPEP) in 2001, revealed that 70 percent of the households, on an average, in four districts of West Bengal, invest in private tuition in primary education to ensure "quality education for

the child". While the quantum of family expenditure on primary education varied between 1.96 to 7.32 percent of the total family expenditure per year, the expenditure on private tuition happened to be nearly 35 percent of the total family expenditure on education, an overwhelming majority of who belong to the most socially and economically disadvantaged sections of society.

The crisis in primary education in India has reached a state when the Planning Commission, Government of India, had to quote the World Development Report 2004 (Making Services Work for Poor People): "In random visits to 200 primary schools in India, investigators found no teaching learning activity in half of them at the time of visit." It is time that the major non-government education providers, foundations and the civil society in India take the lead in reforming the system,

taking advantage of the following policy pronouncement of the Planning Commission: "Public-private-partnership (PPP) is an alternative to the traditional approach of providing services through the in-house facilities. Community participation, through supervision of schools and involvement of non-profit service agencies, in providing social services is being increasingly favoured and encouraged by the governments."

*Prof. A.K. Jalaluddin has held senior faculty and technical advisory positions at NCERT, Directorate of Adult Education, Delhi University, UNESCO, UNDP, and UNICEF. He has had a long association with educational research and training and has contributed significantly in the field of elementary, secondary and adult education in India and abroad.*

---

## Educational development index and what it reveals

Vimala Ramachandran



Government of India and National University for Educational Planning and Administration have developed an educational development index using four variables - physical access to an elementary school, infrastructure, teacher related characteristics and outcome, using retention and dropout rate, and an "exit ratio" being the proportion of children who enroll in class one and successfully complete the primary cycle. Educationists may squabble over the robustness of these indicators and we may be able to make this index more sensitive. Nevertheless it reveals a lot about the regional variations that exist in the country.

The five "worst ranking" states, on elementary education (composite primary and upper primary together), are Bihar (35), Jharkhand (34), Assam (33), Uttar Pradesh (32), Arunachal Pradesh (31) and West Bengal (30). The top five ranks go to Kerala, Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka. Though Delhi and Chandigarh rank quite high, they cannot be compared with large states having both rural and urban areas. The ranks of states traditionally seen as being educationally backward are Chhattisgarh 24, Madhya Pradesh 29, Orissa 27 and Rajasthan 25.

Here are some startling facts. If we take the ratio of primary schools to upper primary schools it is quite alarming to note

that the worst situation prevails in West Bengal where the ratio is 5.28, meaning that there is only one upper primary school (class 5 to 8) for 5+ primary schools. Next to West Bengal is Jharkhand with a ratio of 3.97. Perhaps this indicator drags the W. Bengal ranking down. Travelling across districts of the state reveal that the situation on the ground is indeed quite grave. A large number of children who complete class 4 are not able to access schooling because of a severe shortage of upper primary schools or high schools with upper primary sections.

Another set of sensitive indicators of quality and functionality are the percentage of single classroom schools, the percentage of single teacher schools and percentage of schools with a pupil-teacher ratio of more than 100.

The five states with high percentage of single classroom schools are Assam (52.59%), Andhra Pradesh (24.83%), Meghalaya (18.39%), West Bengal (15.04%) and Jammu and Kashmir (11.39%). Goa also has a high percentage of single



classroom schools being 23.94% - however the average size of the school is small with around 24 children per classroom. The percentage of children enrolled in schools with a student-classroom