Among the many dreams and aspirations that modern and modernizing societies cherish for their children is the dream for free and universal schooling up to a basic school level and of equality of educational opportunity for education beyond that stage. In India this dream is enshrined in the Constitutional promise of free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of fourteen and in the Constitutional guarantee of equality of educational opportunity irrespective of differences in religion, caste or sex. However, neither goal has yet been realized. This paper describes some of the obstacles to the achievement of these goals and suggests some ways in which these obstacles may be overcome.

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THE GOAL AND ITS DISILLUSIONMENT

Among the many dreams and aspirations that modern and modernizing societies cherish for their children is the dream for free and universal schooling up to a basic school level and of equality of educational opportunity for education beyond that stage. In India this dream is enshrined in the Constitutional promise of free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of fourteen and in the Constitutional guarantee of equality of educational opportunity irrespective of differences of religion, caste or sex. Since the country does not have the resources essential for the purpose, the objective of universal free and compulsory education up to the age of fourteen has been temporarily postponed. The official goal has been toned down to the more realistic target of universal primary level education. However, the guarantee of equality of opportunity remains unaltered.

Both goals are yet to be realized. Available statistics on school enrolment convey the impression that the target of universal primary school education has been largely met. However a close look at the manner in which these statistics are compiled reveals that they only confuse the issue by masking the gap between the target and the achievement. According to the statement in the Draft of the Sixth Five Year Plan (1978-83) enrolments in standards I-V number 433 lakhs and accounts for 101 per cent of the population of the relevant age group of 6 to 11 years. This suggests nearly cent per cent enrolment of the relevant age group at primary school. However, the fact is that as a consequence of delay in school enrolment which is very common in the country and of the equally common phenomenon of "failure" on the part of many children, leading to their having to repeat their classes, a large number of the 433 lakh children enrolled in Stds. I-V are much older than the 6-11 years considered appropriate to these classes. Their presence distorts the enrolment viewed as a percentage of the 6-11 age group to present an inflated picture of enrolment.

Evidence from other sources, particularly data from studies on drop-out and retention of those who are enrolled in school clearly indicate that the country is as yet a long way from universal primary school education. They indicate that as many as 60 per cent of the total population of children enrolled in the first standard of school drop out before they complete the four years of the primary school stage. Thus even if one were to assume 100 per cent enrolment of children in the first year of primary school, not more than 40 per cent complete the four years of primary

While there is thus clear evidence of the failure to realize the national goals of universal primary level education, data on drop-out at successive stages of school and on the socio-economic backgrounds of university students indicate that the promise of equality of opportunity of education has not been realized either. Access to successively higher levels of education is more and more exclusive. High school students are almost invariably drawn from a higher socio-economic bracket than middle school and primary school students, and college students, in turn, come from more privileged socio-economic and caste backgrounds than high school students. On the whole university education continues, by and large, to be more accessible to children from white collar occupation backgrounds than to children from agricultural backgrounds, more accessible to males than to females, more accessible to children from urban areas than to children from rural areas and more accessible to children from upper castes than to children from the lower castes (Rajagoplan, C. and Singh, J., 1968; Sharma, K. N., 1974).

It is well-known that this situation has been brought on by two factors, which are related to each other very much in the fashion of the proverbial two sides of a coin, and which, in a sense, combine to create the vicious circle in which all progress towards universal and equal education in the country is caught. The first of these two factors consists of a series of obstacles to enrolment, retention and good performance at school, which scores of children face due to poverty, physical location away from facilities for schooling, cultural isolation from the mainstream culture of the school, membership of castes that were traditionally denied education, sex discrimination and other such circumstances. The second is the inflexibility of the educational system, or more specifically its inability to adapt to the needs of the children who encounter these obstacles.

Efforts have been made, both to help disadvantaged children overcome the obstacles they face and to introduce such structural reforms and innovations in the system of education as are required to facilitate the schooling of the disadvantaged. However, progress towards the universalization of schooling and towards equalization of opportunities is slow and unsatisfactory.

This paper makes a brief effort to spell out the complex manner in which some of the seemingly familiar obstacles to education operate, and to suggest ways and means by which some of their effects may be overcome.

**POVERTY**

*Inability to Pay for School*

Poverty, by far the best known of all the obstacles to education, is generally believed to operate in the form of an inability to pay for school. Consequently, measures for extending school education to the poor tend to concentrate on the provision of free schooling, free transport, free books, stationery and other materials, free or subsidized meals and snacks, etc. To the extent that poverty does consist of the inability to pay for school, these measures have a positive impact. But they fail to solve the more complex impediments to the schooling of the poor.

*The Obligation to Earn*

The most important of these, is the obligation to earn. Despite the I.L.O. Convention and a series of supportive
Indian rules and regulations prohibiting the gainful employment of children, Indian children function as wage earners in a variety of occupations that value them, not only because they provide cheap labour but also because they are quick to learn their jobs and easy to control as workers. (Cicourel A. C. and Kitsose John, I. 1977; Husen, Torsten, 1977; Jenks, G., 1975; Rist, Ray, C. 1977).

The extent of the employment of children in India may be gauged from the fact that the Census of 1971 indicates that boys below fifteen years of age constitute 5.29 per cent of the male work-force and girls below fifteen years of age constitute 9.12 per cent of the female work-force. More likely than not, these figures account only for child labour which is paid for and thus registered in the Census as "gainful employment". Scores of children in the country are known to be regularly engaged as unpaid family labour in agriculture, and in crafts like basket-making, sericulture, weaving and pottery, or as unpaid helpers in services performed by their parents or other relatives for wages. They are known to be required to look after their homes or to care for their younger siblings, in order to release the elders for gainful employment. Thus they contribute to the income of their families by full-time or part-time work and are "earners" regardless of whether they are accounted for in Census statistics or not.

This fact of the massive employment of children, in contravention of national and international conventions and regulations, underlines the fact that poverty in the country is so severe that many families need to put their children to work in order to survive. Yet, there is practically no provision for the schooling of full time, or even part-time workers. Children who work full-time are almost invariably forced to stay out of school because school demands full-time attendance. It is not easy for those who work part-time to cope with school either. They find it difficult to meet requirements regarding attendance, home work and extra-curricular activities, and generally, to keep pace with their peers. As a result they lag behind, perform poorly and frequently drop out of school altogether.

This is largely because schools are designed almost exclusively for full-time learners. Although the obligation to help children from poor homes is profusely articulated, the notion that children who will not, or cannot, devote full time to school lack motivation to study lingers, and inhibits the generation of the sympathy that is essential for positive ameliorative action on behalf of working children. If the obligation to provide for the education of working children is squarely faced, it should be possible to design programmes to facilitate their schooling.

For instance, assuming that children who work are unable to attend full-time school, it should be possible to organise part-time school instruction in such a manner that courses normally administered over a year can be spread over sixteen or eighteen month periods. Apart from thus organizing instruction in units that are different from those in which courses are normally administered to full-time learners, it should be possible to develop pedagogic techniques specially suited to part-time schooling. For instance, programmed learning assignments, done under close supervision. It should, also be possible to organize examinations in a manner better adapted to the constraints that working children face.

In view of the dire need for children from poor families to earn, the Government should seriously consider setting up
centres where both schooling and gainful employment are provided for needy children. This may seem to be in total contravention of international conventions and sentiments regarding the employment of children but in view of the level of the poverty of the masses and of the paucity of Government resources for supporting children through school, it may prove to be the most effective course of action. The State could also fulfil its obligation to compulsory education by using its powers of compulsion to make it obligatory for those who employ children to cooperate and to provide towards their education.

The needs of working children are far more complex and heterogeneous than those of full-time learners. The designing of strategies to make it relevant, feasible and attractive for them to take formal education requires imagination, innovative ability and tremendous capacities for organization. Nevertheless the success of the "night schools" that serve domestic servants and hotel boys in the city of Bombay and of morning colleges and evening colleges for office workers indicates that it should be possible to design suitable programmes for working students of different age groups, different categories of employment and at different levels of learning.

Parental Preoccupation with the Struggle for Survival

Poverty functions as a disadvantage to school in yet another way. Parents struggling for survival and for basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing or employment are not in a position to fulfil their obligation to enrol their children at school at the required age. Much less are they able to meet the obligations to attend P.T.A. meetings or to participate in activities for which primary schools and middle schools often draw upon the help of parents. In situations in which schools are reluctant to admit children who are older than the age of five or six plus required, delay in admission may mean permanent forfeiture of the opportunity for schooling. But even in situations in which schools are more liberal with regard to age requirements, a late start may cause permanent damage to a child's school career. Meanwhile, parental failure to help their children with their homework, to attend P.T.A. meetings, to keep in touch with the school and to perform the obligations routinely required, may adversely affect the motivation and the self-confidence of children and damage their performance.

In order to help children from poor homes overcome the handicaps that thus arise out of parental failure to enrol children in school at the proper age and out of parental inability to meet the several obligations that schools require of parents, it is necessary to establish services which take on these responsibilities on behalf of parents. These services should be responsible both for the initial enrolment of children from poor homes and for continued monitoring of their progress through the years. In a sense they need to be designed to function as parent surrogates or substitutes with the capacity to step in wherever parents fail. They would have to be organized at the community level and to be operated in units that are small enough to maintain close and continued contact with the children they are expected to serve, and to remain sensitive to their needs.

Deprivation

Apart from the difficulties described above there are several other inadequacies
that children from economically dis­
advantaged homes have to face. Among the
major inadequacies suffered are those
relating to food, shelter and other basic
necessities of life. It has been observed that
children from poor families are deprived
of nutritive, brain building proteins, in early
infancy, and enter school with a deficiency
that proves to be a continuing handicap.
(Freire, Paulo, 1973; Illich, Ivan, 1973;
Reimer, Everett, 1974). This handicap is
further aggravated by continuous hunger
and malnutrition, and by unsanitary and
substandard living conditions.* It is
reflected in their poor stamina, limited
capacity to concentrate, frequent illness and
repeated absence from school. These
children lack space, privacy and quiet to
study and to do their homework. In cities
like Bombay and Calcutta, where the poor
dwell on pavements, they may have to live
without any of these basic facilities at all.
In addition to all this, they have to suffer
frequent interruptions to school as they are
required to stay at home and help when­
ever there is an illness or some other crisis
in the family.

All these disadvantages are continuous
and cumulative, with the result that if
children from poor homes manage to enter
school at all they have to wage a constant
battle with their circumstances in order to
survive through school. If they do survive,
they are so exhausted, mentally and
physically, by the time they arrive at the
terminal stage of school, that they are
unable to achieve a high level of per­
formance at the school leaving stage. Since
admission to courses leading up to pres­
tigious jobs and occupations depends
heavily on performance at the school leaving
certificate examinations this, in effect,
means that they lose out even as they
arrive at the portals of opportunity.

Thus, it is obvious that in addition to
adapting education to the needs of
working children and in addition to pro­
viding special services to ensure the timely
enrolment and continued monitoring of
progress of children from poor homes, it is
necessary to install services, to help poor
children overcome the effects of continued
physical deprivation and emotional strain.

The most effective way of dealing with
the problem would probably be to institute
residential schools, where children are
protected from the continuous ravages of
poverty. The demand that poor parents
make for admission of their children to
orphanages and to institutions for the
destitute and the orphaned indicates the
need for such provision. Since practically 60
per cent of the population lives below the
poverty line, it would be impracticable to
provide this facility for all the children
who need it. Nevertheless, it should be
immensely useful to mobilize funds for the
purpose, and organize residential school
facilities for children from poor homes to
the extent possible. If schemes for the
purpose are carefully designed and proved
to be successful, it should be possible to
attract support from industry and from
bodies like the Lion's Club, the Rotary
Club and other organizations committed to
service. It should also be possible to get
Indians who have migrated abroad to
support such schemes and programmes. The
author has observed that many of the
Indians who have migrated to affluent
countries are keen on financing programmes
for assistance to the needy in their home­
land. Since they seem to be on the look­
out for organized agencies doing meaningful

* In one case observed by the author the mother administers opium to her children and
makes them sleep through periods in which she is unable to feed them adequately.
work, they should be willing to finance groups that run such programmes for children.

Where provision of full residential facilities is not possible, partial assistance can help. One imaginative school in the city of Bombay has been able to achieve a substantial reduction in its drop-out rate and to obtain marked improvement in the performance of its children merely by providing a dormitory which economically disadvantaged day scholars use when they need to. In addition to lighting for children to do their homework at night, comfortable beds to sleep in this dormitory is provided with bathroom and toilet facilities for the children to use. It is also provided with a supervisor who functions as tutor and counsellor to the children. Neither food nor clothing are provided and the children go home for their meals. Nevertheless there is visible gain from the facilities provided.

Another school in the city helps its economically disadvantaged children by closely watching the attendance and the performance of individual children and by stepping in with personalised help at each point at which assistance seems to be needed. Teachers and students function as an integrated community for this purpose. The assistance rendered may range from special coaching by a teacher or a senior student for a pupil who lags behind, or counselling for some emotional problem that a child faces, to reaching out with help with respect to some domestic crisis, which at a particular point of time, inhibits a child from giving adequate attention to school work. The programme functions on the basis of the observation that most children from disadvantaged homes suffer permanent damage due to the fact that they do not have appropriate and timely assistance at points at which their circumstances are particularly trying. It is based on the faith that if these children are given appropriate support at these points both the physical fact of the support and the moral boost they experience because of the interest shown by others have a lasting effect.

Both these programmes demonstrate the effectiveness of help that is sensitive to individual needs. They indicate that whereas broad generic programmes such as those that provide for scholarship, freeships, health care, nutrition or even counselling for the economically disadvantaged are important they need to be supplemented with services that identify the individual needs of these children and promptly provide the assistance required. They also bring out the need for those who provide such personalized assistance to work in close collaboration with the school.

One way of providing personalized help to economically disadvantaged students would be to develop guardianship schemes whereby individual children are "placed" under the supervision of teachers and or of senior students who function as guardians. Since the scheme can be effective only if the ratio between guardians and wards is really small, it would be useful to mobilize other voluntary workers to function as guardians. College student volunteers could be involved in the scheme under the N.S.S. programme. It should also be possible to enlist the help of Mahila Mandals and other voluntary organizations to provide volunteers to function as guardians. The organization of this kind of a scheme calls for a great deal of ability to organize but it has an advantage in that it can easily lend itself to the utilization of individual volunteers — for instance housewives, who are eager to do some welfare work.
Enrolment in Inferior Schools

Whereas the disadvantages of poverty dealt with so far arise out of the home and the environmental circumstances of economically disadvantaged children, there are others that arise out of the inadequacies in the schools in which these children happen to be placed. For instance, in the existing hierarchies of our society where educational facilities range from the excellent to the very mediocre, children from poor homes are almost invariably placed in schools with poor physical facilities and with poor performance levels. This, in effect amounts to denial of equal opportunity to them. The standards at some of these schools are so poor that even if the children manage to survive through the primary and the secondary levels at these schools, they are rarely able to hold out in the open competition that is involved in School Board and other qualifying examinations on the basis of which certification for completion of a school is awarded, and entrance into higher levels of education is granted.* Thus, they are indirectly edged out of qualification for courses leading up to the more prestigious and profitable occupations, and excluded from opportunity just as they arrive at the point at which possibilities for upward mobility open up (Cicoured, A. C. and Kitsose, John, I. 1977; Husen, Torsten, 1977; Jenks, C. 1975; Rist, Ray, C. 1977).

It may seem that this problem can easily be tackled by upgrading the physical facilities of the schools, which serve the economically disadvantaged. Experience indicates that such upgrading does not necessarily lead to an improvement in performance. Although physical facilities are important, standards are the outcome of interaction between factors such as the level of the aspirations of the students at a school, the realities regarding the occupational openings and opportunities likely to be available to them, the aspirations that teachers cherish for their students and the impressions and opinions regarding the abilities and the futures of their students that they hold. They are also an outcome of the kind of intellectual experiences and exposures that students and teachers have outside schools, etc. It is relatively easy to improve and to standardize physical facilities at schools but it is well nigh impossible to obtain the ethos and the cultural climate that promotes standards and performance levels in schools which mainly serve the advantaged sectors of the population. The answer therefore lies in ensuring that children from poor homes are not segregated for schooling. In fact, the concept of the community school or the neighbourhood school is rooted in the conviction that the only way to halt the class system that seems almost invariably to emerge in schooling is to mix populations from the different social classes in a manner that prevents the segregation of those who are already privileged into schools that are launching pads for further advantage.

However, it is well-known that the problem of inequalities in school cannot fully be overcome by strategies such as the provision of neighbourhood schools. To the extent that inequalities in school are an outcome of more deep-rooted and extensive inequalities in the social structure they cannot be eliminated without sweeping changes in the structure of social organiza-

* E.g. data on the results of secondary schools run by the Municipal Corporation in Bombay indicate that only about 20 per cent of the students that these schools send up for the Secondary School Board Examinations pass as compared to about 50 per cent passes from amongst all those who appear.
tion. This fact has agitated thinkers on education throughout the decade of the seventies. Many of those who are concerned with equality of opportunity for education, and particularly those who are committed to equalization of opportunities for those who are economically or culturally disadvantaged for schooling, have argued that the entire school system is heavily biased in favour of the continuation of power for the privileged elite. This is largely acknowledged. However, the structural changes involved in removing these inequalities touch upon basic issues of ideology. They are politically explosive and have made for a rift between thinkers on education that is too wide to be bridged. (Freire, Paulo, 1973; Mich, Ivan, 1973; Reimer, Everett, 1974).

UNEDUCATED PARENTS AND PARENTS IN OCCUPATIONS THAT DO NOT REQUIRE EDUCATION

The disadvantages suffered by children who have uneducated parents and by those who have parents who do not follow white collar occupations are less visible disadvantages of poverty, but they are significant.

Poor Motivation

It is generally assumed that the major problem with uneducated parents lies in that they are unable to appreciate fully, the advantages of education for their children and that they consequently fail, either to enrol their children in school at the appropriate time or to enrol them at all. It is also known that even if they do enrol their children in school, uneducated parents generally fail to provide them with the motivation, encouragement and continued support required for sustenance through school.

Poor Equipment

Although this stereotype of uneducated parents is largely valid, what is probably even more disturbing is that even if uneducated parents happen to be aware and appreciative of the value of education and are eager to help their children, they are not adequately equipped to do so. In fact some of the Indian studies on the correlation between the education of parents and educational performance and aspirations of children suggest that uneducated parents are not altogether as unappreciative of the benefits of education for their children as they are generally made out to be (Aikara Jacob, 1979). Many of them hold a sacred respect for education. Nevertheless they are a source of disadvantage to their children for other reasons.

Basically the problem starts with their ignorance regarding when, and how, to launch their children into school. It is evident at the very outset of the school careers of their children, in their inability to make informed decisions in the matter of the choice of schools in which to enrol them. It operates in their inability to help their children with their school work, their inability to guide them in the choice of courses and of careers, in their failure to function suitably as role models for the academic and intellectual growth of their children, in their inability to relate to school, to teachers and to provide a proper liaison between home and school, and generally, to provide within the home, an atmosphere and an ethos that is conducive to learning.

The disadvantages suffered by children from blue collar occupation homes or from homes where the elders do not follow occupations that call for formal education are roughly similar to those experienced by
children from uneducated homes. For instance, findings from what is possibly one of the most heavily researched issues in education viz. the differences between the school performance of children from blue collar working class homes and children from white collar middle class homes suggest that the basic problem in the education of children from working class homes lies in the fact that the process of socialization within the homes does not equip them for the requirements at school.

Problems with Socialization

Schools place a high premium on capacities for articulation, for conceptualization and for the use of a variety of mental skills. Research studies indicate that all these capacities, normally nurtured in middle class white collar homes, are by comparison, neglected in blue collar working class homes. They illustrate the point by the following evidence: (1) that unlike as in middle class white collar homes, language in working class homes depends more on gestures and on intonation than on a complex vocabulary; (2) that abstract concepts are less important in communication and interaction between persons in blue collar working class homes than in middle class white collar home; (3) that the development of manual skills and dexterity gains precedence in the former whereas the development of mental skills is given priority in the latter. (Bernstein, Basil, 1960; Kockeis, Eva, 1978).

Parental Influence

Studies also reveal the strong influence of parental occupations in children's educational and occupational aspirations. Children of parents who practice professions like medicine, law, engineering, etc., and more particularly, the children of scientists, academicians and school teachers seem not only to aspire to higher levels of education but to choose more sophisticated fields of study than the others.

Strategies for Help

A two-pronged effort is needed to help children from uneducated homes and from homes in which the elders do not follow white collar occupations. Firstly it is necessary to organize extensive services to provide the parents of such children, information about the possibilities of the education of their children. These services should not only be informative but should also guide and counsel parents in making plans and choices both for the schooling and the post-school education of their children. Simultaneously, children who come from such homes should be carefully provided with remedial learning aimed at improving their conceptualization and their capacity for articulation. They should also be provided with special guidance and counselling for choice of courses and of a career.

Cultural Isolation

A closely similar handicap is that which is suffered by children who belong to cultures that are different and isolated from the culture that predominates at school. This handicap which may be described as cultural isolation is reflected in phenomena such as the difference between the language used by tribal children, by children from city slums or by lower caste children from several other minority groups in their homes and the language that they are required to use at school. It is also reflected in the dissonance between the images, stereotypes, values, norms and patterns of behaviour and the interpretation of experience that operate in the homes of these children and those that operate at school.
Researches which have documented the nature of this dissonance and tried to identify the difficulties that are faced by children from alien cultures or sub-cultures in adapting to school indicate that the problem is not merely one of bridging the cognitive gap between the images and frames of references in the two worlds to which these children belong. It is also a deeply emotional problem faced by children in establishing their identity between the two disparate worlds to which they are required to relate. Their difficulties are aggravated by the fact that schools are insensitive to the problem and tend to force the children into the requirements of the dominant culture. If they do not conform to this culture, they are evaluated as inadequate and unsatisfactory.

Help for the Culturally Disadvantaged

In as much as early school education is a process wherein the child is led from the known to the unknown, the task of helping children belonging to subcultures that differ is highly complex. One way of coping with the problem is to ensure that teachers, for the first few years of school, are drawn from the same subcultures as the children. However, this is not always feasible. A more reliable way of handling the problem is to consciously design teaching so that children are gradually led from their sub-cultures on to the wider culture. This generally involves a redesigning of teaching materials so that the language, images, concepts and illustrations from the world that these children are familiar with rather than from the dominant culture are used in the early years of schooling. It also requires a conscious transition to the language, concepts, images, etc., of the dominant culture through successively higher levels of schooling.

The handling of this problem has received considerable attention in the United States, where the assimilation of children from migrant communities into the dominant culture has presented a serious problem. The education of minorities such as the Blacks, the Hispanics, the Puerto-ricans and the Orientals has grown to be a highly specialized responsibility of the State Department of Health, Education and Welfare in that country.

In India, the problem has not yet been recognised or dealt with in a major way; nevertheless, there are some efforts that are striking. For instance, a group of researchers at the Tribal Research Centre for Maharashatra, at Poona, have identified several syllables and sounds in the Marathi language that tribal children are unable to articulate. They have further identified that tribes differ from each other with respect to which specific syllables they are unable to pronounce. Schools for tribal children have been asked to take note of these findings, and to help tribal children, both by taking special care to help them articulate these syllables and at the same time by being lenient about their inability to pronounce them in situations in which they are evaluated, for reading or recitation.

The problem has also been dealt with in the course of efforts to help children from city slums. For instance one major programme of action-research to prevent school drop-out among children from slums in the city of Bombay was able to obtain positive results merely by changing the physical arrangements of the classroom, by changing the time table and by changing the text-books to suit the life-style and the experience of these children.

Those who conducted this programme observed that coming from crowded slum homes, the children when newly enrolled,
found the spacious classrooms with benches and desk arranged in rows, cold, unfriendly and forbidding. Used to being on their own to play and wander as they liked, they found the school hours long and oppressive. They failed to be excited by the primary school texts and readers and seemed on the whole to be indifferent to the school programme. The social workers running the programme substituted the benches and desks with mats and allowed children to squat informally as they would at home. They introduced more frequent breaks and more frequent changes in activities than was customary. Above all they designed books and teaching materials for children in such a way that the words and the pictures that occurred in the books represented objects that were known to be common in the slum environment to which the children belonged. The kind of changes in teaching materials that were involved is illustrated by the substitution of a lesson on Kamal (Lotus) with a lesson on Ghar (House) in the first reader at primary school. This was done because it was observed that slum children had hardly ever seen and were unlikely to see a lotus. Thus, the programme was able to bring about a noticeable improvement in the attendance and the performance of the slum children by introducing small changes that helped the school to be in better tune with the culture from which the children were drawn.

Far more serious problems may be involved in dealing with older children. For instance, schools dealing with tribal children have to contend with sex norms that are very different from the white collar middle class norms that are generally accepted as "proper" by schools. Teachers and school managements who are unable to accommodate to these norms may alienate children and force them out of school. The same may happen in situations in which patterns of control and authority at school differ markedly from those in the home. The education of tribal children, particularly of children from the tribes that were formerly considered to be criminal tribes, of scheduled caste children, and of children from other sectors of society which constitute subcultures that are altogether different from the mainstream of the culture of the school, hinges on the sensitivity with which strategies for help are able to lead children through their own cultures to the culture of the larger community.

Actually, the entire issue of the education of children from minority sub-cultures, particularly of children from the subcultures of groups that hold a relatively inferior status in society brings to the fore the delicate ethical and moral issue of the justice of imposing the dominant culture upon children from subcultures. While pedagogic considerations require that children be allowed to grow within the framework of their sub-cultures, at least in their earlier years, competitive aspirations for upward mobility compel these children to adapt to the dominant culture as early as possible. The juxtaposition of interests involved in this are illustrated in the well-worn controversy regarding the education of tribals in our country, where the strong advocates for the "assimilation" of tribals in the dominant culture are opposed by equally strong advocates for a policy of allowing the tribals to "flourish in their own culture".

CASTE — A LEGACY FROM THE PAST AND ITS CONTINUED DISADVANTAGE

In some ways similar to, but far more serious than the disadvantages that accrue from cultural deprivation are the disadvantages suffered by children belonging to the scheduled castes. In order to appreciate the
disadvantages suffered by these children, it is important to recognize that it is barely some decades since members of these castes were categorically excluded from formal education, because they were believed to have been born so low in ritual status as to be underserving of schooling. The rationale on the basis of which they were thus excluded from education is highly complex and intricately enmeshed in the ethics and the philosophy of the caste system. Nevertheless it may be summed up in the belief that learning is a sacred activity to which persons with a low ritual status cannot be admitted. With the growth of liberalism, and of the new commitment to equality and to the brotherhood of man in the twentieth century, the exclusion of some castes from formal education was recognized to be discriminatory and unjust. By the dawn of Independence, the latter sentiments had matured into a Constitutional commitment to the promotion of education amongst persons belonging to these communities.

Consequently, children belonging to these castes are not only provided with special scholarships, freeships, hostel facilities, etc. but are further assisted with the provision of reserved 'seats' for admission in schools as well as in institutions of higher education and by several other supports by which to overcome the handicaps accruing from their past.

However, these disadvantages linger to create handicaps in different ways. The most important of these is poverty and of belonging to homes in which the adults are not only uneducated but involved in occupations that do not call for formal education. Scheduled caste children also happen to belong to subcultures that are significantly different from the upper caste culture that predominates at school. Then-languages, their beliefs, their norms and their behaviour are conspicuously and significantly different from that of the upper caste children who predominate at school.

As a consequence of all this, and of generations of subservience, scheduled caste children are diffident and suffer from a sense of inferiority and ineffectiveness. They lack a forceful conviction regarding their right to equality. The little confidence that they do have is often knocked out by the behaviour of some caste-Hindu teachers who continue to believe in the inferiority of the scheduled castes.

Thus, regardless of their being singled out for special protection, children from the scheduled castes continue to be backward in education. This is not only reflected in the fact that the scheduled caste population of the country has a poorer level of literacy than the rest of the population (14.71 per cent as compared to 29.35 per cent for the total population according to the Census of 1971) but also in the fact that scheduled caste children have a poorer school enrolment rate than that of others. Moreover, it is evidenced in the fact that at all levels of education their failure and drop out of school is conspicuously larger than that of the others. Studies on the issue also indicate the scheduled caste children are enrolled in relatively inferior institutions of education, and that they are poorly represented in courses leading up to prestigious jobs and occupations (Chitnis, Suma., 1972; 1974; 1975; 1978; 1979).

Programmes for Help

Special schemes for reservations in higher education, scholarships, freeships, and hostel facilities, at all levels of education, for the benefit of the Scheduled Castes, have been in operation for three decades. But most of these schemes are inadequate and unsatisfactorily operated. Moreover, the schemes are too impersonal.
SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

For instance, in many states scholarships are not provided at the school stage at all. Where they are provided they are too meagre to compensate for a child's absence from gainful employment, too small to release children for full time school. Scholarships for education at the post-school level are uniformly provided across the country, under the Government of India's post-matric scholarship scheme, but they are grossly inadequate to sustain students through college. In fact they are inadequate even to pay for their basic needs at a level of subsistence. Moreover they are poorly administered and irregularly paid. This suggests that it is necessary to increase the financial and the other physical provisions given to Scheduled Caste students, both at the school and the college levels, on a scale that is substantial enough to make it feasible for them to take education. Further, that it is necessary to ensure that the administration of these provisions is efficient and effective.

The policy of reservations does not function very effectively either. Reservations certainly help in securing scheduled caste students admission to higher education. They are particularly useful in obtaining their admission to prestigious courses like engineering and medicine, and to prestigious institutions like the I.I.T's. But data indicate that those who are thus admitted lag far behind those who have been admitted on the basis of open competition. Many are unable to cope with their studies and drop out.

This suggests that it is necessary to supplement the policy of reservations in higher education with careful remedial teaching for scheduled caste students to start from the early years of school. If their segregation into separate schools did not carry other disadvantages, this could possibly be best done by instituting separate schools for the scheduled castes. In view of the dangers of segregation, one hesitates to suggest separate schools — unless of course they are made to be academically so effective in remedial teaching that their products are able to establish parity by sheer excellence. Remedial teaching or reinforced teaching through the school years needs to be followed up with special coaching continued through the college course. Institutions like the I.I.T. at Bombay have found it highly advantageous to provide such coaching for students admitted on the basis of reservations. Special coaching has also helped in improving the performance of scheduled caste students at the I.A.S. and other competitive examinations. It should be useful to extend the facility to provide it from early school onwards so as to ensure that the education of scheduled caste children is strengthened from its foundations.

Apart from strengthening the financial and the academic supports now available to scheduled caste students, and from providing special coaching to ensure that they are able to cope with their academic work, it is necessary to find ways and means of improving their self-confidence. This is largely a matter of getting teachers to appreciate the problems that scheduled caste children face and of equipping them to tend to the personality development of scheduled caste children.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF SEX, RURAL RESIDENCE AND OTHER DISADVANTAGES

In addition to the disadvantages discussed above there are several others that are equally obstructive to the growth of universal primary school education and to the establishment of equality of opportunity for education in the country.
Among the most difficult to cope with are those that relate to the education of women. Basically, the disadvantage operates in the form of a lack of conviction about the fact that schooling is as important for girls as it is for boys. This is accentuated by factors such as: early marriage or betrothal accompanied by prohibitions against the schooling of married or betrothed girls; the practice of requiring girls to do a larger share of housework than boys; the expectation that they should stay at home when needed to look after siblings or to do some domestic chores; inhibitions against sending girls long distances to school and against sending girls to co-educational schools, etc. While all these factors inhibit the enrolment of girls at school and lead to the early withdrawal of those who are enrolled, sex-role type conditioning on the part of teachers, administrators, curriculum planners and parents lead to a situation wherein girls are taught subjects suitable to their 'feminine' roles and denied adequate opportunities to study subjects like science and mathematics.

The disadvantages of rural children are equally difficult to cope with. These children suffer from most of the disadvantages listed above. They suffer from poverty, they are first-generation learners and they are culturally isolated from the middle class white collar urban culture of the school. In addition, they have to suffer the disadvantage of being located away from facilities for education. The Government of Independent India has striven to provide a primary school within a five mile radius of every village in the country, but this distance is difficult enough for little children to traverse. Moreover, the absence of middle schools, high school and institutions for higher education in the vicinity narrows the horizons of village children and inhibits the growth of their aspirations.

COMMENTS

The foregoing listing of obstacles is not exhaustive. It merely indicates the magnitude and the complexity of the task involved in the realization of the Constitutional promise of universal education and the Constitutional guarantee of equality of opportunities for education for all children. It is evident that major structural changes and innovations in the organization of education are required in order even partially to achieve these goals. It is also evident that a variety of services need to be instituted in order to facilitate the education of disadvantaged children.

It is doubtful if either the structural changes or the institution of services required will come about unless there is an informed and a committed public movement to meet the challenges involved. Such a movement does not seem to be in the offing. In fact although there is visible discontent and dissatisfaction with education in the country there is total apathy of voluntary effort for remedial action. This is particularly noticeable in view of the observation that there was considerable public involvement and action in education prior to Independence. In fact the major pre-independence achievements in education in the country were gained through voluntary effort. After Independence, public involvement in education dropped — possibly in the faith that the Government would be equal to the task of meeting Constitutional objectives in education. However, three decades of experience indicate that the task is difficult, and that public involvement and assistance are needed. One hopes that the United Nations' declaration of 1979 as the Year of the Child has generated the public commitment essential for this involvement.
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