Understanding Girls' Absence from School in Madhya Pradesh, India:

An Investigation

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Abstract

This thesis investigates why all girls of school-going age in rural Madhya Pradesh, India are not in school. Official documents and data from India give the impression that girls' participation in school has improved tremendously in the past decades and India is heading towards achieving the targets of the Millennium Development Goals. The government claims that the increase in girls' enrolment is the result of the effective implementation of incentives and targeted interventions. I explore how this claim is reflected on the ground, especially in rural areas. Empirically, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with four groups, the first of which consisted of six out-of-school girls, the second of 24 parents (12 fathers and 12 mothers) of out-of-school girls, the third of three school teachers, and the fourth of five administrators of the education department operating at different levels, in the Ratlam district of Madhya Pradesh, India. Drawing upon their accounts I show that the incentives provided by the education department to bring all girls into schools are not robust enough to act as encouragement. The social positioning of girls and women, the perceived future role of girls as mothers and home-makers, the patri-local marriage system, community pressure and the usefulness of girls at home have detrimental consequences for girls' education. These detrimental consequences are augmented by the ways in which teachers and educational administrators operate. The absence of an effective implementation system for the incentives set up by the government to encourage girls into school further undermines the latter's educational opportunities. I argue that gender divisions as a form of deprivation continue to operate in relation to the decision-making process regarding girls' schooling.

Key words: Gender and education, girls' elementary education, girls' absence from school, India.

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that all the material provided in this thesis are original and has not been published elsewhere.

Introduction

My research is concerned with investigating the factors influencing girls' non-participation in school education in rural India. I embarked on this project because I wanted to understand better what prevents girls from obtaining an education. My interest in this research comes from my own educational history and the professional experience I have had in the field of elementary education. As a fairly well educated woman, that is a woman who at one point took the education of girls for granted, I was not aware till I grew much older, of the fact that 41 percent of girls of my generation never went to school (Desai and Patel, 1985). Living in a city, coming from a relatively high caste and a middle-class background, I never faced any problem with schooling or pursuing my education. My father who himself was an MPhil degree holder and my mother who was a school teacher had high aspirations for my two sisters and I who have no brother, regarding our education. Going to school at the age of around five, and education came as a matter of fact to me and my sisters. I, my sisters and all of my cousins got married after completing our higher education. Like my father, my husband too was supportive regarding my further education. My parents, my husband, my immediate culture, and the society that I live in, never put any impediments on my education. Education came very naturally to me. But unfortunately this is not the case for all girls in India. Unlike girls of the upper castes and middle-and upper-class families, girls belonging to lower castes and lower economic strata, especially girls residing in villages, encounter enormous obstacles pursuing even elementary or basic education (Lewis and Lockheed, 2007; Rampal, 2005; Ramchandran, 2003), though we are citizens of the same country and enjoy the same statutory rights to 'free and compulsory education' provided by our Constitution. Why then this divide in education?

My interest in girls' education was also reinforced by three different experiences in my life. First, I was moved by the book *The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis (2000), the compelling story of a girl in Afganistan. The girl in the story is forced to disguise herself as a boy in order to support her family. The story portrays the harsh reality girls confront in society and the barriers they encounter when seeking an education. Though the whole story revolves around the cultural and religious context of Afganistan, the same may hold

true in other developing countries, especially in India, where the practice of traditional values and customs is very strong (Kabeer, 2003).

The second experience, in 2003, was a personal one. I was taken aback when Gayatri, the woman who then baby-sat my child, announced the marriage of her 13-year old daughter, Sangeeta. All my efforts to convince her of the bad effects of early marriage had no impact on her. Her argument, 'this is the system in our society and I have to abide by it' was stronger than the fact that marriage of a girl before attaining 18 years of age is illegal in India. This made me wonder how many Gayatris and Sangeetas there are in our society who succumb to such traditional practices. Why is it more important to marry a girl off rather than send her to school even in the twenty-first century? The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, though enacted, has largely remained un-enforced (UPI, June 23, 2005). As the matter tends not to be policed, people are inclined to violate and manipulate the law, rules and regulations that are not enforced. Lack of enforcement of legal provisions makes people more confident of infringing the law as they see zero risk involved in this ('Madhya Pradesh Draws …', May 14th, 2005).

My urge to take up this research was also due to my work experience in the education department of the Government of Madhya Pradesh, a both educationally and economically challenged state of India. Working for this department enlarged my horizon regarding the education of girls. As a member of the state-level planning and implementation team, I engaged with the policies, programmes, strategies and interventions intended to bring girls into the fold of school education. This gave me the opportunity to visit several village schools in Madhya Pradesh. Ironically I found a complete mismatch between the policies and interventions envisaged at state level and reality at village level. The state level vision regarding girls' education does not percolate down. It was quite surprising to find the proportion of girls enrolled in school being only one third that of boys. This made me to wonder, where are the girls? If females represent fifty percent of the population why is this not reflected in the enrolment of the school? Though the scenario improved officially in the post National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level[1] (NPEGEL) (which provided free uniforms to all girls enrolled

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[1]NPEGEL: Launched in 2003, the NPEGEL attempts to provide additional support to enhance girls' education and focuses mainly on 'hard to reach' girls through intensive community mobilisation. More details regarding this programme can be found at http://ssa.nic.in/girlseducation/brief_NPEGEL.pdf.

in classes one to eight) implementation period, the attendance of girls still remained one of the grey areas. A closer scrutiny of the attendance register of schools reveals the fact that girls' attendance fades after the initial days of the opening of the school. The overall attendance rate of girls as per the school register and the head count on the day of a school visit never matched, the latter always being on the lower side. Another feature noticed in the schools was the attendance of girls in the pre-and post-lunch periods. Girls who come to school vanish after the lunch break (after the mid-day meal is served) in the majority of cases. In villages one finds girls engaged in activities such as carrying water, cleaning vessels or carrying their siblings during school hours instead of learning in school.

These experiences raised certain questions in my mind such as, why is the enrolment of girls not on a par with that of boys? Why do girls who are enrolled in school not attend school? Why do girls drop out of school at an alarming rate? Why are the different incentive schemes of the government to promote girls' education not able to achieve the desired changes?

Much research in the field of elementary education has been done worldwide and more specifically in India, especially in the last decade (Jha and Jhingran, 2005). Research on elementary education in India includes the issue of universalising elementary education. Though the existing research reports (UNESCO, 2007 and 2003; UNICEF, 2006 and 2005a; Oxfam, 2006; UNDP, 2006 and 2003) try to some extent to address the questions mentioned above, they lack an in-depth understanding of the issue of non-participation of girls in school. Government-sponsored research studies (Rajya Shiksha Kendra, 2001; Aggarwal, 1999; Ed.CIL, 1998) argue that the economic deprivation of families is the major cause of girls remaining out of school whereas most of the research produced by independent researchers and agencies (Rampal, 2005; Leclercq, 2003; Roy and Khan, 2003; Dreze and Sen, 2002; Karlekar, 2000) points to the laxity in the implementation of policies and programmes. There is thus some discrepancy in the explanatory models for understanding girls' absence from education between different sources. It seems the agenda of the source of research, in a way, influences the outcome of the research. Thus there is a need to look into the issue of non-participation of girls in education in a more non-aligned manner. Further research into the 'non-participation of girls in education' could lead to a better understanding of the problem of implementation of targeted

programmes for the education of girls. Through my research in this thesis, I analyse in greater depth and identify certain factors that are impediments to girls' education, exploring the attitudes of the girls themselves, their parents, community members, the teachers and officials from the education department.

At present there is no dearth of programmes to promote girls' education in India and in Madhya Pradesh, for example the NPEGEL, *Mahila Samakhya*[2] (education for women's equality), *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya*[3] (KGBV) and the National Programme of Nutritional Support in Primary Education[4] (NP-NSPE), popularly known as the mid-day meal programme. School facilities in close proximity to pupils' habitation, free uniforms, free textbooks, hostel facilities and crèche facilities are but a few of the incentives and facilities provided to facilitate girls' education. With all these facilities and incentives in place, the present scenario of girls' education in Madhya Pradesh still offers a gloomy picture, with a gross enrolment ratio (GER) of girls at primary level at 98.6 percent, 81.6 percent at the middle level, and the participation of girls in school at less than 43 percent and a dropout rate of 24.17 percent (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2007a). Thus the obvious question arises, why are girls the worst hit? What are the key constraints in bringing girls to schools and keeping them there without which one cannot think of achieving universal elementary education, the much talked-about goal in the field of education at present? Through my research, then, I intend to examine in detail the factors that contribute to girls' non-participation in school, without which the universalisation of elementary education will remain a dream.

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[2]*Mahila Samakhya* (MS): The MS programme was launched in 1988 on a pilot basis. The objective of the project was the empowerment of women in rural areas to achieve equality. Details about the programme can be found at http://education.nic.in/ms/Genesis.pdf.

[3]*Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya* (KGBV): KGBV provides residential facilities for girls belonging to the Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe, Other Backward Classes and minorities in educationally challenged areas. The objective of the KGBV is to ensure access and quality education for girls from disadvantaged groups of society by setting up residential schools with boarding facilities at elementary level. More details can be found at http://www.education.nic.in/Elementary/kgbv_guidelines.asp.

[4]NP-NSPE: Popularly known as the mid-day meal scheme, it covers all children in government, government-aided, local-body schools and the alternative schools, the Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education Schemes. Started for the children of the primary classes (up to class five) initially, the scheme now covers the children of the upper primary classes too (up to class eight). The scheme aims at enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance of children in school, while improving their nutritional level. More details are at http://www.education.nic.in/mdm/FINAL_Guidelines_MDM_19_sept.pdf.

In the first chapter I outline the background of my research by discussing the status of girls' education in general, that is, from a global perspective, and of their education in India in particular. I examine the constitutional provisions and policy initiatives taken by the state in order to elucidate the formal context of girls' education. I also discuss girls' and women's status in Indian society to provide a preliminary understanding of the relation between their social positioning and the unique problems they face in trying to obtain even basic education. In the following chapter I capture the macro-level picture of girls' education by surveying previous scholarship on the topic. Outlining the findings of the existing research was particularly helpful in shaping my own research as I shall explain in more detail in that chapter. In Chapter 3 I analyse the overall process of my research and the methods I used, including the conduct of my fieldwork in three villages in Madhya Pradesh, a centrally located state of India; the methods I used to locate my participants; the process of my data generation and analysis of the same. This chapter also encompasses my reflection on the entire research process and the choices and decisions I made in the course of my fieldwork.

Together Chapters 4 to 7 present my analysis of the findings of my research. In Chapter 4, I start by examining how girls' education is perceived by the parents and the girls who are the heart of my research. I ask the question: what do my interviewees mean by 'girls' education' and how do they relate girls' education to various spheres of their lives. I examine the parents' and the girls' perception of the usefulness of the knowledge acquired in school to that of girls' future lives and in obtaining a suitable job. I then switch my attention to analysing the impact of opening up of the school in closer vicinity of the village, the available facilities and the incentives which are part of the discourse on ensuring girls' participation in education. This chapter is also an investigation of the role that the teachers' behaviour plays in promoting or otherwise education for girls.

Chapter 5 explores how women's positioning within the family – biological and in-laws' - and society impacts on girls' educational opportunities. Here I investigate the gender-based traditional practices and the socio-cultural milieu of the community which influence individual family's behaviour and decisions regarding girls' education. Whilst in Chapters 4 and 5 I attempt to understand the familial and social contexts that influence girls' exclusion from education, in Chapter 6 I examine the teachers' perspectives to understand the relationship between the school environment and girls'

exclusion from education. By taking a closer look at the teachers' standpoint I show how they cope with the challenge of increasing girls' participation in school education. I examine the teachers' educational, social, and professional background and the impact this had upon girls' exclusion from school education.

So far the focus has been on the perspectives of the grassroots-level stakeholders. In Chapter 7, in contrast, I turn my attention to the administrators of the education department. I investigate the positioning of the administrators of the education department at various levels in mapping out the role they play in the management of educational programmes and their impact on girls' education. In the final chapter I summarise and discuss my main findings and the way forward for accomplishing increased girls' participation in school education in rural India. For now, however, I turn to establishing the background against which girls' continued exclusion from school in Madhya Pradesh needs to be understood.

Chapter 1
Background

Access to education by women is considered a significant indicator for the progress of a society. According to Brown (1991), the education of women in a society determines its social, financial, natural, physical and human capitals, and contributes to its growth and development. Education is a significant factor influencing the socio-economic and health conditions of the family and for determining gender relations in society. Moreover, as Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (1989) stresses, the education of women strengthens their position in the family and community and thereby produces multiple benefits. Sen argues that the education of women is the single most powerful way to encourage smaller, healthier and better educated families. As educating women helps in slowing down the population growth (Jeffery and Basu, 1996) and increases productivity, encouraging the education of women and closing the gender gap in education promotes faster growth of per capita income. Owing to its considerable benefits, economists believe that investment in educating women and girls will bring the highest return for developing countries by promoting women's social and economic status (Herz, 2006; Conway and Bourque, 1995). My argument here, however, is not merely an economic one. As a feminist I am equally concerned with women's life opportunities, their empowerment, entitlements and rights as well as with the notion that women should have equal access to resources, including education.

Already in 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights acknowledged the right to education and declared that elementary education should be made free and compulsory (United Nations, 1948). The International Bill of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) includes provisions for free and compulsory primary education and emphasises non-discrimination in education. To turn this ambition into reality, several treaties and declarations have been promulgated since then. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979)[5] and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989)[6] include 'the most comprehensive sets of legally enforceable commitments concerning both rights to education and to gender equality' (UNESCO, 2003: 25). 173 countries ratified CEDAW by 2003 and CRC has been ratified

[5]This convention was adopted in 1979 and came into force in 1981.
[6]The CRC which was adopted in 1989 came into force in 1990.

by almost all the countries of the world (UNESCO, 2003). The most recent step taken at the international level in this direction is the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 for achieving Education For All (EFA) which was reaffirmed by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the United Nations in the same year. Both the Dakar Framework and the MDGs include time-bound targets such as the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary schooling by 2005[7] and to have all eligible children attend free primary schooling by 2015 (UNESCO, 2003).

The Asia-Pacific Programme of the Education For All Report, 2006 (UNDP, 2006) states that while many regions across the globe have shown a progressive record of girls in school, the Asia Pacific and South Asia regions still lag behind. This poses a serious challenge for the regions to achieve 'Education For All' by 2015 as the 2005 gender parity target in education set by the United Nations at the dawn of the new millennium has already been missed. An obvious question here is why it has been so difficult to achieve these targets. My thesis in part addresses this question.

The countries farthest from the target set by the United Nations in 2000 for achieving the Millennium Development Goal, i.e. gender parity in primary enrolment by 2005, even after a decade, are in South Asia: Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nepal. Some countries with large gender gaps in primary and elementary enrolments also have low net enrolment rates and even lower completion rates for girls. In Pakistan, for example, the net enrolment rate for girls is only 50%, and 75% of girls in rural areas drop out at the primary level. Even countries that have approached or reached gender parity in primary enrolment, nevertheless have low attendance and completion rates for girls, indicating that a substantial number of girls are still either not attending school or have dropped out. According to the UNDP report of 2006 both enrolment and completion rates for girls are much lower in rural than in urban areas.

There are only a few developing countries in which poor, rural girls are close to achieving universal elementary education. Though the enrolment in primary education has increased worldwide by 6% between 1999 and 2004 and the biggest rise was recorded in Sub-Saharan Africa (27%) and the South Asia (19%) regions (UNESCO, 2007), girls continue to face sharp discrimination in access to schooling. In Sub-Saharan

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[7]That date has of course already passed and inequalities still remain.

Africa girls have 20% less chance of starting school than boys. According to the UNESCO 2003 report, in terms of girls' access to school, India is considered one of the poorest performing nations, with a gender parity index[8] of 0.81. India is also considered a nation at risk of not achieving gender parity in both primary and secondary education by 2015 (UNESCO, 2003) although she is legally bound, through ratification of the CEDAW and CRC, to meet the provisions for universal primary education and gender equality.

At the turn of the millennium, an estimated 104 million children worldwide of primary-school age were not enrolled in school. Girls comprise 57 percent of all out-of-school children (UNESCO, 2003). As cited in the same report, 21 million out-of-school girls were residing in the countries of West and South Asia. According to the UNESCO report, 2007 the administrative enrolment data provided by the governments of different countries do not match the data from household surveys. The number of out-of-school children estimated through the household survey conducted by UNICEF during 2005 was 115 million, whereas it was only 94 million according to the administrative data (UNESCO, 2007).

This phenomenon can be observed in India too. The estimated number of out-of-school children in India was 4.6 million in 2004 (UNESCO, 2007). However, according to a nationwide sample survey (All India Survey of Out-of-School Children) conducted in 2005, the estimated number of out-of-school children in the country was 13.4 million, three times more than the earlier administrative record (MHRD, 2005). The administrative data are based on the enrolment of students according to the school records. In household surveys, in contrast, members of the household (normally the head of the family) are asked whether the child/children are attending school or not. In the household survey, the actual participation of children in school is recorded rather than giving importance to the mere entry of a child's name in the school register. In an extensive survey of primary schools conducted across India in 2005, Pratham found that the average absentee rate of children was 30 percent on the day the schools were visited (Pratham Resource Centre, 2005). It can be argued here that the administrative data may not reflect the actual scenario regarding the number of children receiving school

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[8]The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is the ratio of the female-to-male value of a given indicator. A GPI of 1 indicates parity between sexes; a GPI that varies between 0 and 1 indicates a disparity in favour of boys; a GPI greater than 1 indicates a disparity in favour of girls (UNESCO, 2003: 5).

education as it is based on school entry records. A child and to be more specific, girls, may be enrolled in a school (as per the school record) but may not actually attend school and hence not receive effective schooling. Being enrolled in school is not necessarily the same as attending school.

While evaluating the status of gender parity in India, girls' enrolment as a proportion of the total enrolment, it was observed that '47% of the students enrolled in primary classes in 2004-2005 were girls compared to […] 43.6% in 1999-2000'. At the upper primary level, '44% children enrolled in 2004-2005 were girls compared to 40.4% in the […] year 1999-2000' (MHRD, 2007: n. p.). The figures indicate that though there is a slight reduction in the gender gap over the period, the existing gap is still unfavourable towards girls. This signifies a gender gap (a difference in boys' and girls' enrolment in percentage points) of 4.2 percent at the primary (class one to five) and 8.8 percent at the upper primary (class six to eight) level.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report (2007) of UNESCO also confirms the poor educational status of girls in India, when it reports that 136 girls are not in school for every 100 boys. In India nearly a third of rural girls have never been to school. The Madhya Pradesh Human Development Report (hereafter MPHDR) of 1995 (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1995) further sketches the grim picture of children's participation in education when it mentions that only around 70 children enter into class one, out of 100 children of the school-going age group. Out of those 70, as many as 35 leave the school system and never complete the primary cycle. The number of students who complete class eight is less than ten. Additionally, the report argues that these data, being an average estimate at national level, conceal many realities and the report suggests that for

girls and in rural areas the picture will be more startling. The latest MPHDR (2007) indicates that when we look at the retention rate in the primary cycle, more than 30 percent of children who enter class one never reach class five (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2007b).

As in India as a whole so in Madhya Pradesh: despite a number of efforts, a major gap still exists between boys and girls in terms of enrolment, retention and their academic achievement. There is a high gender gap of 24.84 percent in literacy, which is indicative

of the lower social status of girls and women in this central Indian state (Government of India, 2001a). The retention rates show that almost half the children are not enrolled in the middle section or class six. The problem of retention is a matter of concern as 70 percent of children enrolled in class one survive the primary cycle but only 50 percent survive the upper primary cycle. Only 50 percent of children as cited in the MPHDR 2002 (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2002a) complete the elementary level. Girls are the greatest casualty in this regard.

These figures clearly indicate that there is still much to do in the field of girls' education before India achieves the Millennium Development Goals. The low educational status of girls in India cannot be seen in isolation as it has a relation to and bearing on the low status of women in society in general. Thus the problem of girls' education needs to be located in the overall situation of women in Indian society.

'It is said that women do three-fifth of the world's work, earn one-tenth of the world's income and own one-hundredth of the world's assets' (Ramachandran, 2003a: 23). Ramachandran argues that though women participate enormously in the labour force, their contribution in general goes unnoticed. Though 27 percent rural women and nine percent of urban women are in the formal workforce (Government of India, 1991) and the participation rate of rural girls of the 10-14 age group in the labour force is higher than that of boys (Government of India, 1997 and 2001b) they remain invisible as they mostly work in the home, farm and in informal sectors. Women's and girls' involvement in the informal work force results in their omission in national statistics despite the fact that a number of sample surveys (National Sample Survey Organisation, 1997, National

Council of Applied Economic Research, 1999) indicate that the number of girls and women working in agriculture is in fact large and growing. Additionally, Ramachandran rightly states, '[w]omen work on the land, on looms, take care of cattle and so on – but they rarely own them' (2003a: 24).

Such work, of course, does not require literacy, and indeed, inspite of various efforts by the government, the literacy rate among women in India is abysmally low (54.3 percent according to the Census of India 2001). In some states, for example in the state of Madhya Pradesh, the literacy rate of women is just 50 percent, much lower than the male

literacy rate of the state (76.80 percent) according to the Census of India 2001 report. That means that every second woman in this state is illiterate. This scenario is even grimmer for women living in the rural areas of Madhya Pradesh. The state average of rural female literacy is 42.96 percent and in some districts it dips to as low as 20.86 percent (Government of India, 2001a).

Not only in terms of literacy but more generally there is a significant gender divide in Madhya Pradesh, which is one of the most economically challenged states of India. The survival rates for women in Madhya Pradesh for example have historically been alarming. According to the Human Development Report of 2001, female life expectancy is 56.7 years against a male figure of 58.2. There is a higher risk of death for women than men. The sex ratio in Madhya Pradesh is declining which can be observed from the fact that in 1901, the sex ratio was 990.2 females per 1000 males. This has come down to 920 females per 1000 males in 2001 according to the census 1901 and 2001 of India (Government of India, 1901 and 2001a). The above data underline the widespread gender discrimination prevalent in Indian society where women do not enjoy the same opportunities as men. Women's life chances and choices are more restricted than men's. Girls' unequal access to, and retention in the school system is 'both a cause and a consequence of these [widespread] disparities' (UNESCO, 2003: 3). I therefore explore gender disparities in education in India with a special focus on Madhya Pradesh.

Before moving to examining the factors that affect the educational opportunities for girls in India, it is imperative to look at the measures and initiatives taken by the state to

ensure basic education for all its citizens. The Indian constitution commits to providing education for all her citizens (Sudarshan, 2000). Introduced in 1950, the constitution guarantees 'free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of fourteen' and includes a number of important provisions that have a direct or indirect bearing on education. Article 45 of the Directive Principle of the Constitution imposes direct responsibility on the state for education. It intends that the state should provide the necessary facilities within a period of ten years from the commencement of the constitution[9]. Article 16 imposes non-discrimination in employment on the grounds of

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[9]This Constitutional obligation has been deferred time and again, successively to 1970, 1980, 1990 and then to 2000. The approach to the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07) has set as a target all children completing five

sex in the public sector. Furthermore, Article 15(3) empowers the state to make special provisions for the development as well as the welfare of women and children. These provisions were made to justify the special allocations and relaxation of procedures and conditions to expand a girl's access to education (Desai and Thakkar, 2001).

After India gained independence in 1947, political leaders and administrators assumed that the provision of a school in the form of an actual school building would pull in all children and lead to an educated population within a stipulated period. This proved to be wrong even after more than a decade when the 1961 Census of India revealed the national literacy rate to be just 28.30 percent. Moreover the gender gap in literacy was 25 percent in 1961 (Government of India, 1961). The report of the Indian Education Commission constituted in 1964 was a landmark in Indian educational history. This commission examined the role and goals of education in the process of national development. The report was followed by the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1968 which emphasised the need for initiating programmes to provide equal educational opportunities to both sexes (Sudarshan, 2000). It highlighted girls' education as a means to speed up social transformation. In 1976, the 42nd amendment of the Indian Constitution brought education onto the concurrent[10] list and thereby extended responsibility for this to the central government. Until then it had been the sole responsibility of the state governments. As a result, foreign financial assistance became available for elementary education and resources increased steadily between the 1960s and the 1980s (Sudarshan, 2000).

The Programme of Action which followed the NPE in 1986 placed a high priority on girls' education (Government of India, 1992). It stressed that the central issue was the 'removal of disparities and to equalise educational opportunities by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far' (Government of India, 1986: 7). The policy set a target date for achieving the universalisation of elementary

years of schooling by 2007. In reality this has still not been achieved, six decades after the introduction of the Constitution.

[10]'Concurrence' here refers to the joint responsibility between a state (a sub-area within India) and the central government. In India, areas of responsibility such as 'education' are grouped under three headings: a 'state list', a 'central list', and a 'concurrent list' in recognition of the federal structure of the country. The 'state list' includes areas where the state governments can legislate, the 'central list' reserves areas for the Government of India, whereas the 'concurrent list' includes those areas where both state and the central government have joint responsibility. Education was the subject of the states until 1976. After the 42nd amendment of the Indian Constitution it was placed on the concurrent list.

education for children of 6 to 14 years of age and the eradication of illiteracy among the 15 to 35 year age group by 2000. The chapter titled 'Education for Women's Equality' of the NPE argues:

> Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The [n]ational [e]ducation [s]ystem will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and social engineering. […] The removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in, elementary education will receive overriding priority through provision of special support services, setting of time targets, and effective monitoring. (Government of India, 1986 and 1998: 8)

The NPE stresses the importance of initiating innovative programmes for the empowerment of women through education. As a result, the country witnessed a number of programmes which include the much talked about *Mahila Samakhya*[11], education for women's equality in 1989 and the Total Literacy Campaign[12] in 1988. The National Policy on Education in 1992 (the modified version of 1986) and the following Programme of Action reaffirmed the emphasis on universal elementary education (Government of India, 1992a and 1992b). The National Policy on Education envisaged:

> [T]he improvement and expansion of education in all sectors, elimination of disparities in access and laying greater stress on improvement in the quality and relevance of education at all levels […] It also emphasises that education must play a positive and interventionist role in correcting social and regional

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[11]The *Mahila Samakhya* (education for women's equality) programme which started as a pilot project in ten districts comprising three states of India in 1989 has grown extensively and in 2010 it is being implemented in 63 backward districts in the country covering nine states. It offers an example of the importance of empowerment of women as a critical precondition for facilitating greater inclusion of women and their daughters into education. Further, it provides an alternative paradigm for women's mobilisation and empowerment to the current and dominant focus on economic interventions as the principal strategy for women's empowerment. The programme emphasises helping adult women to take decisions in favour of their daughter's education (Government of India, n. d.). More information is at http://education.nic.in/ms/ms.asp.

[12]The Total Literacy Campaign, launched in 1988, originally aimed at attaining a literacy rate of 75 percent by 2005. It imparts functional literacy to non-literates in the age group 15-35 years. This age group was its focus because it is in the productive and reproductive period of life. The total literacy campaign offers a second chance, for those who missed the opportunity or were denied access to mainstream formal education. Special care is taken to bring disadvantaged groups like women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes into the programme. The basic objective is to create a generation which will ensure that their children are educated, to realize the dream of Education For All.

imbalance, empowering women and in securing a rightful place for the
disadvantaged and the minorities. (MHRD, 2005-06: 2)

In 2002 the Constitution of India was amended (86th amendment) to alter the provision of
Article 45 of the Constitution (Rampal, 2005). This makes the provision of free and
compulsory education a fundamental right[13] and affirms the old commitment of the state
towards education of her citizens (Jha and Jhingran, 2005). The 86th amendment inserted
a new Article – 21A - which reads: 'The State shall provide free and compulsory
education to all children of the age group of 6 to 14 year, in the manner as the state may,
by law, determine.'

The central government imposed an education tax ('cess') of 2 percent on direct and
indirect central taxes in 2004 to meet the cost of the programme, *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*[14]
(the education for all movement) aimed at universalised quality basic education for all
(MHRD, 2005-06). The then Union Human Resource Development Minister, addressing
a conference of education ministers from all states in 2004, said that 'the money collected
through the education cess was being parked in a non-lapsable fund. We have to go
beyond paying [*sic*] platitudes and prove ourselves in making *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* a
success as we cannot take shelter under excuses of resource crunch anymore' ('Sarva
Shiksha Abhiyan …', 2004).

In tune with the Constitutional provisions, the priority given to education by the
government was reiterated time and again, 'looking upon education as the "key vehicle
for social transformation"' (Sudarshan, 2000: 45). The policy level commitment for
universalising primary education was reflected in programmes such as the District
Primary Education Programme[15] (DPEP) launched in 1994, the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*
(SSA) launched in 2001-2002 and the National Programme for the Education of Girls at
Elementary Level (NPEGEL)[16]. The DPEP is funded by foreign agencies such as the
World Bank and the European Union whereas the SSA is implemented from the

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[13]This was previously kept under the Directive Principle of State Policy of the Indian Constitution.
[14]*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (education for all movement) was launched in the year 2001 to cover the entire
country with the target that all children should be in school by 2003; all children should complete primary
schooling by 2007 and all children should complete eight year of schooling by 2010.
[15]In the DPEP project 85 percent of the cost is borne by foreign donors through the central government and
the remaining 15 percent by the state governments.
[16]NPEGEL was launched in September 2003 as an integral but distinct component of the SSA to provide
additional financial input for girls' education.

education tax imposed in 2004. The SSA builds upon the experience of the DPEP and is a comprehensive programme covering the entire country.

The DPEP, launched initially in 42 districts of India and expanded eventually to 271 districts comprising 18 states, was designed to improve access to primary education and to increase the participation of children in schooling. The major objectives of DPEP were achieving gender and social equality; its strategies and interventions were tailored to address the special needs of disadvantaged groups. The programme was supposed to: i) provide access to all children to primary education through formal primary schools or their equivalent through alternatives; ii) reduce overall dropout rate at primary level to less than ten percent; iii) increase achievement levels by 25 percentage points over and above the measured baseline levels; iv) reduce disparities of all types to less than five percent (Department of Education, 1993). With these objectives, the programme intended to reach out to more girls, improve their academic achievements and reduce gender disparities in respect to enrolment, retention and academic achievements.

The SSA, as portrayed by the government of India, was 'a historic stride towards achieving the long cherished goal of universalisation of elementary education (UEE) through a time bound integrated approach' (MHRD, n. d.: n. p.). The objectives of the SSA, to be achieved by 2010, are: i) all children in school by 2003[17]; ii) all children to complete five years of primary education by 2007; iii) all children to complete eight years of elementary education by 2010; iv) a focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with an emphasis on education for life; v) to bridge all gender and social gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010; vi) universal retention by 2010. The SSA's strategies include the involvement of local community groups, institutional capacity-building at all levels and the preparation of district elementary education plans. Furthermore, the strategies comprise of interventions through provision of infrastructure, appointment of teachers, their training, and the incentivization of parents and students by providing mid-day meals, uniforms, textbooks and so forth. It is interesting to note that though the government introduced one school education programme after another, their effectiveness and outcomes were minimal. The question

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[17]This target, after it remained unmet in 2003, was revised and reset for 2005. The objective is still to be achieved five years on (2010).

here is why are these government sponsored programmes which are a repetition of each other in respect to their aims, strategies and interventions not able to produce results?

To make the provisions of the Constitution a reality, Madhya Pradesh became the first state in India to conceive a rights-based framework for elementary education through the *Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam* 2002 (Madhya Pradesh People's Education Act 2002). The Act aims at ensuring quality education for all children of 5 to 14 years of age of the state. The first of its kind in the country, the Act strives for ensuring the improvement of quality in government-run and government-aided elementary schools through the sharing of responsibilities. As claimed by the Madhya Pradesh government, universal elementary education is a collective endeavour of the government and society. The Act is 'shaped by the vision of education as a collaborative process of the teachers, learners and the local community and the role of the government as facilitating this process towards the twin goals of equity and quality' (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2002a: 25). The aim of the Act is 'to foster processes that help school emerge as a strong unit accountable to the local community of parents, with all other structures performing the role of school support institutions' (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2002a: 25). The Act bestows on every child the right to elementary education and aims at eliminating all hindrances that exist to access and participate in school education. It seeks to do so with a dual strategy: improving the delivery system and creating social pressure. The Act aims at strengthening the process of decentralisation initiated by the government and lays down the rights and roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders: parents, teachers, local bodies and government. The key components of the Act are:

- Every child in Madhya Pradesh has the right to access elementary education of quality. The Act says, '[n]o child shall be denied admission for elementary education in [g]overnment or local body schools' (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2002b: 804 [12]).

- If any person prevents a child from accessing education, he or she is punishable under Section, 4 (2) of the Act. Likewise under Section 22 of the

Act, the *Gram Sabha*[18] can impose a fine on a parent, who is wilfully not sending the child to school.

- No tuition fee shall be collected from any child studying in any government and local body school of the state under Section, 6 (1) of the Act.

- Based on the local requirements, '[t]he schedule of [school] time and local holidays shall be prescribed by the Parent Teacher Association'[19] (PTA) to facilitate the right to education especially of deprived communities and girls (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2003: 804[13]).

- Punishment of children in school in any form is banned according to clause 'c' of sub-section 2 of section 5 of the Act.

- Management of school is the responsibility of the PTA (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2003).

- The PTA to monitor and ensure regular attendance of teachers and students in school.

- Each school to have a *Shala Shiksha Kosh* (a core fund) for additional resource mobilisation for the school and to be utilised under the overall supervision and control of the PTA under sub section 2 of section 6 of the Act.

(Adapted from Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam 2002 and Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Niyam 2003) (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2002b and 2003)

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[18]The *Gram Sabha* is the smallest unit of the *Panchayati Raj* Institution (PRI) system in India. All men and women in a village who are above 18 years of age form the *Gram Sabha*. The *Gram Sabha* meets twice a year. Meetings of the *Gram Sabha* are convened to ensure the development of the people through their participation and mutual co-operation. The annual budget and the development schemes for the village are placed before the *Gram Sabha* for consideration and approval. The different problems and difficulties of the people are also discussed in the *Gram Sabha*.The key roles entrusted to the *Gram Sabha* are micro-planning, the social audit of *Panchayat* functioning, the ratification of *Panchayat* accounts, balance sheets, identification and approval of beneficiaries, and supervisory and regulatory functions.
[19]Every school in Madhya Pradesh has a Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Both the mother and father of all the children enrolled in school and the teacher posted are members of this association. The parents elect a president and a vice president and the head teacher of the concerned school is the secretary of the association. The PTA is responsible for the day-to-day and overall functioning of the school.

Prior to bringing elementary education into the legal framework, Madhya Pradesh had also become the first state in India to have a rights-based framework to provide primary education by introducing the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) way back in 1997. The State had innovated this scheme called the EGS to universalise access to primary school facility in the quickest possible time. The MPHDR of 1998 talks in detail about the scheme:

> Under the scheme the government guaranteed the provision of teacher [*sic*]. Her/his salaries, [the] training of [the] teacher, teaching-learning material and contingencies to start a school within ninety days wherever there was a demand from a community without a primary school facility within one kilometre, provided this demand came from [a community with] at least 25 learners in case of tribal areas and 40 learners in case of non-tribal areas. (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1998: 10)

As a requirement of the scheme, the local community or *gram panchayat*[20] contributes in the form of the provision of space for teaching-learning. The prime responsibility of ensuring the critical basic inputs for primary education including academic supervision remains with the government; the community shares the task of universalising primary education through the contribution of creating the demand, identifying the teacher and providing the learning space (Gopalakrishnan and Sharma, 1998). Thus through the EGS the government aimed for 'access to schooling facility focusing on the hitherto un-reached sections in the quickest possible time and thereby convert the rhetoric on universalisation of primary education into a reality in Madhya Pradesh' (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1998: 10). On average, more than forty primary schools were created each day through the EGS in the first year of its operation in 1997. Within one and a half years of operation, 19289 EGS schools had been established in the state, enabling the state government to declare universal access to primary education in August 1998 (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1998). The approach of the EGS was encouraged by the central government and was adopted by other states of the country having large

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[20]The *Panchayat* is a political system in India. '*Panchayat*' literally means assembly (*yat*) of five (*panch*) wise and respected elders chosen and accepted by the village community. Traditionally, these assemblies settled disputes between individuals and villages. The modern Indian government has decentralised several administrative functions to the village level, empowering elected *Gram Panchayats*. The *Gram Panchayat* is the primary unit of the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions. They are local government bodies at village level. As of 2002, there are 265,000 *Gram Panchayats* in India. The *Gram Panchayat* is the foundation of the *Panchayat* system. A *Gram Panchayat* can be set up in villages with a population of more than five hundred. There is a common *Gram Panchayat* for two or more villages if the population of these villages is less than five hundred. Further details are at http://www.babylon.com/definition/gram_panchayat/English.

number of school-less habitations such as Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Orissa (Ghosh, 2004).

Though the importance of universal elementary education has been accepted as a non-negotiable issue in India and in Madhya Pradesh, any advance in achieving this is not striking. Scanning through policy documents in India reveals that the 'rhetoric and official documents are fully in tune with global development thinking and trends' (Ramachandran, 1998: 70). However, the flip side is that '[o]ut of approximately 200 million children in the age group of 6-14 years, only 120 million are in school and net attendance in the primary level is only 66% of enrolment' (Government of India, 2001c: 37). Further, the Aide Memoire of the 16th Joint Review Mission points out that out of these 80 million children who are not attending school about 60 percent are girls (Government of India, 2002a). There are problems relating to the number of out-of-school children, dropout rates and low participation of girls in school (Janshala, 2000). This reveals that 'placing a high priority on education in policy statements does not necessarily ensure […] that marginalised groups [such as girls] are covered by [state-sponsored] programmes' (Sudarshan, 2000: 39). Despite the fact that schemes such as the EGS have been encouraged by central and state governments, and presented as a quick option to open access to un-reached groups, the scheme has been widely criticised by researchers such as Kumar, Priyam and Saxena (2001), Leclerq (2003), and Ghosh (2004) as providing education of lowest quality to disadvantaged groups (Roy and Khan, 2003). The compulsory education Act, though enacted in Madhya Pradesh, has 'largely remained un-enforced, perhaps, due to socio-economic' issues (Government of India, 2001d: 62).

Although a number of programmes have been initiated by the government and various funding agencies, the problem of girls' education especially at the elementary level remains a matter of concern. As Ramachandran (2004a) and the UNESCO report (2007) mention, the discontinuation rate after primary school is particularly high in rural India, more so among girls. It is now widely recognised that these sections of Indian society have not been able to access educational facilities, or even if they do enrol they drop out due to a wide range of factors. The number of girls that have to be brought into the fold of schooling remains dauntingly large (35 million) even after the promulgation of enormous number of policies and legal statements, and the introduction of several

strategies and interventions. The fact that a substantial proportion of the so-called 'enrolled' and 'attending' girls do not attend school, necessitates a deeper understanding of the issue of non-participation of girls in school.

There are many factors which shape the environment in which girls receive education: government policies and practices, the school system, community practices, religious beliefs, cultural attitudes, behaviours and the predominant gender disparities. When we consider the status of women in Indian society over the last century, it is possible to suggest that women have come a long way. For example, in India there are women who have made their way to the summit of the social ladder by becoming Chief Ministers of states, Ministers in the Central Council of Ministers, mayors of city corporations, judges of the high court and the supreme court. There have been women officers in the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service. They have become pilots and officers in Army, Navy and Air Force. They have made a mark as doctors, engineers, software professionals and as industrialists by breaking the male monopoly in these spheres. Verma (2005) even argues that women have ventured into all aspects of life which used to be considered exclusively male dominated. But the National Human Development Report (Government of India, 2001d) debunks this myth, stating that women still have a long way to go in crucial areas such as education, employment, health and decision-making. The above few shining examples cannot conceal the fact that gender equality for the women of India, who comprise half of the population, is still to become a reality.

Especially in India, according to the *Manusmrti*[21] (its date is uncertain, being somewhere between 200 BCE and 100 CE. It probably reached its present form around the second century CE.), a woman is considered as someone who must never be independent. During her childhood she is under the 'guidance and control of her father', during her youth, she is under her husband's control and in her old age, she is under the control of her son (Verma, 2005: 26). Traditionally, marriage is considered to be the only life goal for a girl in Indian society. The responsibilities and functions that are executed by women are mainly related to and conducted within their family and in the community. Though women work an average of 12 hours per day (Rao, 2005), their responsibilities for the

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[21]*Manusmrti* is a comprehensive social code of conduct concerned with rules and laws, attributed to the mythical lawgiver Manu, the ancient sage.

most part carry no remuneration. The daily routine of a woman in a rural Indian village comprises activities such as cooking, cleaning the house, caring for children, fetching water, washing the clothes of the entire family, washing utensils, collecting firewood and other forest products, feeding animals, agriculture or daily-labour related activities. As these are the specific roles assigned to women, the formal education of girls is understood as a waste of time and resources, since school learning is not considered relevant to these activities. Girls' labour has always been seen as necessary to and focused on the home front. Such gender disparities act as a major disadvantage for girls' education as reported in the Asia-Pacific Programme of Education For All Report (UNDP, 2006).

The miserable status of women and girls in India is evident when we look at the extent of child marriage prevalent here. Child marriage is a socially invisible phenomenon and happens on a frighteningly large scale in central and western India. For instance, according to the UNESCO report 2003, 'in 1998, in […] Madhya Pradesh, 14% of girls between the ages of 10 and 14 were already married' (2003:124). Early marriage is used as a means of securing girls' future in Indian society where female autonomy is considered a risk. In rural areas it is not uncommon for families to endorse the early marriage of girls to protect them from premarital sex, as in Indian society virginity before marriage is prized and a must. Thus it is believed that early marriage is the only way to 'ensure that girls will be safely "protected" from premarital sex […] by being placed firmly under male control' through marriage (Shiferaw, 2006: 24).

Child marriages are solemnised every year in Madhya Pradesh despite the fact that this directly contravenes the law banning child marriages in India - the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929. Although this Act sets the minimum age for marriage at 18 years for girls, a large number of underage and in some cases, extremely young children are married off throughout the year (UNESCO, 2003) and all the more on a particular day of the Hindu calendar – *Akshaya Tritiya* - in total violation of the Act. *Akshaya Tritiya* is considered as the most auspicious day for solemnising marriages. The literal meaning of the word *Akshaya* is 'that which never diminishes' - hence beginnings made on this day are considered certain to bring luck, success and eternal good fortune. Indians believe passionately in the notion of *muhurt* – the auspicious time to perform sacraments such as marriage. In spite of modern technology and changing life views, this dedication to a notion of an auspicious time is a prominent feature of Indian life. And on the day of

Akshaya Tritiya it is believed that there is no inauspiciousness to be found, so even checking for auspiciousness is not considered necessary on this day. The day is so auspicious that marriages can be solemnised without consulting a '*pandit*' (person who identifies the right time, the *muhurt*, for solemnising marriage) and hence saves the amount that the *pandit* charges for his services. Due to the dual reason of religious beliefs attached to this day and the reduced cost of solemnising marriage on this day, people choose *Akshaya Tritiya* to marry off their daughters.

While the government of the state claims that it has taken measures to enforce the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), the reality belies these claims. Many such marriages are not registered as this is not a mandatory practice in India. As Shiferaw states, 'marriages are family affairs in which the views of the family members take priority over those of the couple who are to be married. Parents' choices override children's, […] all usurp authority over the law' (2006: 24). Poverty, religious beliefs and tradition obviously still weigh heavily on the locals. The enforcement of the law is inadequate as long as it has no societal and political backing (Sagade, 2005 and UPI, June 23, 2005). The practice of child marriage amongst the community in this area is so strong that a government social worker campaigning against child marriage was brutally attacked on May 10th, 2005. She very nearly had her hands chopped off by an assailant because she was investigating a plan to conduct mass child marriages in a village, 270 km away from the state capital Bhopal the next day. Shakuntala Verma had apparently been camping in a certain village for several days prior to *Akshaya Tritiya* (that fell on May 11 in 2005), to persuade people not to marry off their young children. She had initially gone to the village to investigate a complaint made to the nearest sub-divisional magistrate that child marriages were set to take place in the village. The state government conceded that the attack on the government worker was linked to her attempts to stop illegal child marriages (between girls younger than 18 and boys younger than 21 years of age) from being performed in the village ('Madhya Pradesh draws …', May 14th, 2005). Early marriage constrains girls' movement in public places. Once married, girls even when only aged eight or nine years old, are considered brides and no longer regarded as children. In other words, they inhabit a different social category from 'children'. Therefore married girls, though aged between 5 to 14 years, are not reflected in the education database of the state as they go unreported by their parents in most instances. Ramachandran's (2001a) findings validate this. She reports a number of missing girls in her sample. When she took a closer look

and contacted their parents she found that those missing girls were not reported in the data as parents did not consider them children, since, in her own word, 'these young ones were married' (2001a: 2244).

Unless proper efforts are made to bring girl children into the fold of mainstream education, the status of women in society will remain the same and the state as well as the nation cannot achieve the goal of a developed country. SSA, the flagship programme of the central government, which strives for universal elementary education, cannot be achieved if girls remain out of the ambit of school. The high incidence of non-participation among girls in school makes it essential to base policy formulations for the universalisation of education on a deeper understanding of the gender divide and the process that impacts on school-related decisions in families. The deprivation that girls face due to gender stereotypes is linked negatively to their school participation (Jha and Jhingran, 2005). Thus it is important to understand the process through which gender division in society as a form of deprivation operates in relation to the decision-making processes in society in general and in families in particular, as decisions regarding schooling at the initial stage are taken by parents. There is a need for a deeper understanding of this interplay in the specific context of rural India and I, through my research, intend to contribute to the understandings of the impact of this gender division on girls' education.

In my thesis I shall therefore explore the barriers to girls' education in relation to household structure, community, school and policy. Further I shall assess the existing educational facilities in Madhya Pradesh and their effectiveness for girls' education and identify the gaps between the service delivery system and the educational needs of girls in rural areas. As my key case study I shall analyse the actual problems encountered by girls in getting enrolled in school or pursuing their education in the rural areas of the Ratlam district of Madhya Pradesh. The gross enrolment ratio (GER) of girls in Ratlam is 98.6 percent at the primary level and 81.6 percent at the middle level which is much less than the desired target of 120[22] percent. Ratlam is among the eight districts of Madhya

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[22]The GER is calculated by expressing the number of students enrolled in primary and secondary levels of education, regardless of age, as a percentage of the population of official school age for the two levels. In countries such as India many children enter school late or repeat a grade. Likewise, children below the official school age are also enrolled in school. Thus the GER exceeds 100 percent. In India the GER target of 120 percent is fixed by the national government by taking into account the fact that ten percent of under-

Pradesh with a high gender gap in both primary and middle education. The participation ratio of girls at primary level is 47 percent and at upper primary level it is 42 percent in this district (Zila Shiksha Kendra, Ratlam, 2007). Ratlam is also identified by the state government as one of the disadvantaged districts with respect to key educational indicators such as the gender gap, the number of out-of-school children and an existing gap in school infrastructure that includes school buildings, black boards, toilet facilities, play grounds, etc. (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2007a).

Both the National and the State Government are spending tremendous resources through various programmes and interventions in the state and in this district to promote girls' education. For instance, educational facilities up to primary level are provided within one kilometre of distance from every habitation. Similarly elementary education facilities are provided within three kilometres distance from a habitation. Girls enrolled in class one to eight are provided with free uniforms along with free textbooks. A residential facility is provided for girls to pursue middle/elementary level education (class six to eight) after the completion of their primary cycle. Crèche facilities are available within some school premises to free girls from sibling care so as to facilitate their greater participation in school. Mid-day meals are provided to encourage the enrolment and retention of girls in school. Despite all these efforts, the truth remains the same, namely that the enrolment and attendance of girls in school is still significantly under target (Ramachandran, 2003a).

My thesis therefore addresses the following questions:
- What are the factors that keep girls from entering into or staying in elementary education?
- What are the challenges to achieve gender parity in elementary education as perceived by those involved in education?
- How far does gender stereotyping hamper girls' education?
- How useful are governmental measures such as free uniforms and mid-day meals in promoting girls' entry into and continuation in elementary education?

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aged and ten percent of over-aged children are enrolled in schools. More information is at http://huebler.blogspot.com/2005/04/primary-school-gross-and-net.html.

My research follows a sociological approach. Since educational decisions regarding children and more specifically girls are family decisions in India, it is important to understand the family dynamics, practices and customs which structure that decision-making. I investigate the socio-cultural, religious and economic conditions in the villages of Ratlam district, to understand how these might affect the enrolment of girls into elementary education and their premature dropout from the schooling system.

As already indicated, I conducted my study in Madhya Pradesh, a centrally located state of India. The state is considered one of the most challenged and underdeveloped states in India, with a high incidence of poverty, combined with high infant mortality rates, a poor general infrastructure and low per capita income. Ratlam, selected as the sample district for the study, lies in the Malwa plateau region and is situated in the north–west of the state.

From an economic point of view, Ratlam is a challenged district. The district lacks any significant industry. The economic structure of the district is mainly agricultural. According to the 2001 census, the total population of the district is 1214536, out of which the male population is 620119 (51.05%) and the female population is 594417 (49.95%). 69.75% of the total population lives in rural areas, whereas only 30.25% of people live in the urban setups of the district. The sex ratio of the district is 940 women per every 1000 men (Zila Shiksha Kendra, Ratlam, 2007).

Figure 1. Location of Madhya Pradesh in India.

Source: http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/madhyapradesh/madhyapradesh-location-map.gif.
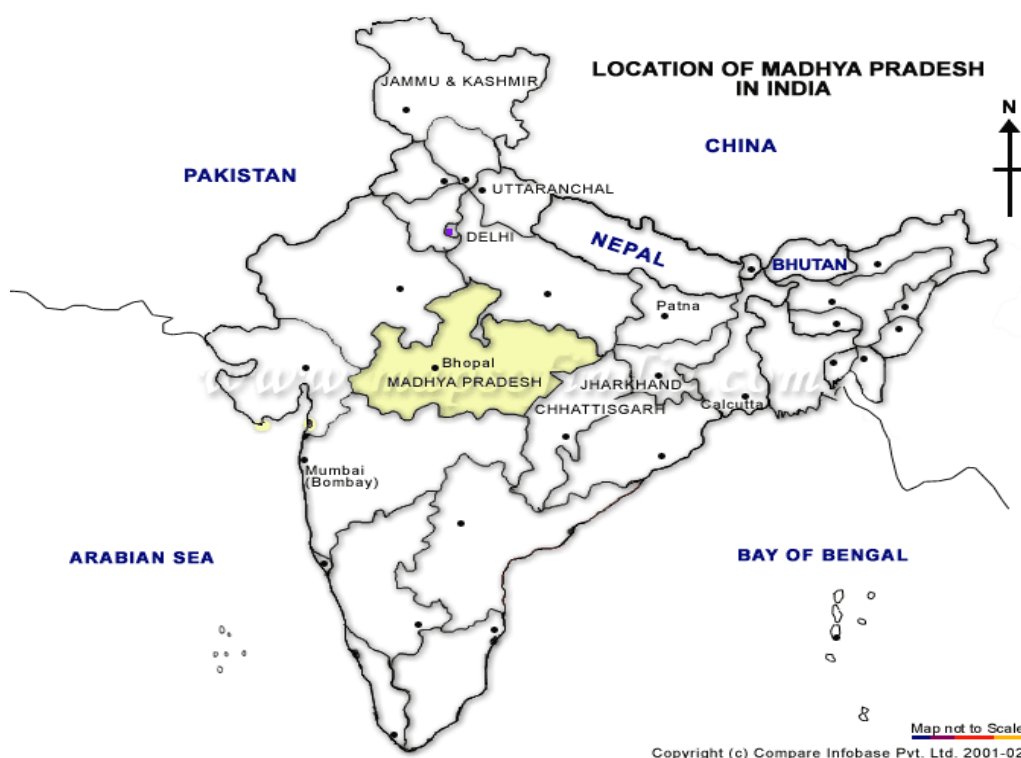
The structure of the general administration of the district is as follows: the district head office is situated at Ratlam city. There are six developmental blocks or administrative sub-units in the district. Out of these six blocks, two are tribal and four are non-tribal blocks. (Table 1, Appendix II)

The literacy rate of the district is 61.73% according to the 2001 census. The male literacy rate is 74.80%, while the female literacy rate is 48.20%, which goes down further to 44.10% in the case of rural women. Thus the gender gap in literacy in the district is 26.60%. The development block of Bajna has the lowest literacy rate (22%) in the case of rural women in the district, followed by Sailana where the literacy rate of rural women is only 32.70% (Table 2, Appendix II). The total number of out-of-school children of school-going age, i.e. 5 to 14 years, in the district is 11819. The total number of out-of-school girls in this age group is 6284 which is 53.16 % of the total out-of-school population (Zila Shiksha Kendra, Ratlam, 2007).

Every year in the month of June, before the onset of the academic year the school education department collects data related to children's (in the age group of 3 to 14 years) educational status through a door-to-door survey across the state. The list of reasons for children remaining out-of-school included in the survey comprises the following:

1. engaged in labour activities;

2. engaged in sibling care;

3. cattle grazing;

4. poor economic condition of the family;

5. lack of awareness of parents towards education;

6. sickness;

7. handicap;

8. non conducive environment of school;

9. migration.

The five main reasons identified by the school education department of Ratlam district for girls remaining out of school are: a) engaged in economic activities (44.40%), b) sibling care (33.23%), c) cattle grazing (10.61%), d) migration (9.40%), and e) the weak financial condition of the family (0.89%). Though there is a mention of the social

attitudes towards gender roles in the survey, certain cultural and traditional beliefs of the society such as child marriage are neglected which may have a bearing on the educational opportunities granted or denied to girls. In contrast to the school education department data, the Human Development Report of Madhya Pradesh (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2007b) states that 4.6 percent of children are not attending school because of social beliefs due to which parents are reluctant to educate girls. My research focuses on the prevailing gender role perception in Indian society and the problematic of girls' schooling whilst identifying the actual barriers and hindrances that make education a far-away dream for girls, especially in the rural areas. In preparation for this, in the following chapter, I survey the existing literature on girls' education in the Asia-Pacific reason in general and in India in particular.

Chapter 2

An Overview of the Literature on Girls' Education in India

There is a wide range of studies on the theme of girls' absence from school education which I shall now discuss in relation to my work. This chapter briefly outlines the theoretical debates on gender and education and on gender and development. I then discuss the literature on gender, education and non-enrolment in India, and then move to review Pierre Bourdieu's (1992, 1984) concept of habitus as it is relevant to understanding some of the gendered processes at play in relation to girls' absence from school.

Gender and Education

My literature review centres on the work on gender biases and inequality in elementary education. The central question that my research focuses on is why more girls do not start and stay in school in India, despite the fact that educational inequality has been singled out as a major infringement of the rights of girls and women and an important barrier to social and economic development in both national and international forums. The issue of universal elementary education has been debated time and again in the last six decades. In 2000 it became the centre of attention once more among policy makers, administrators, practitioners and the academia circle after the declaration of the Millennium Development Goals (Kumar, 2006a; Mishra, 2005). The decade since then has witnessed a significant increase in the importance accorded to education, especially the education of girls, at international, regional as well as national levels, with arguments being made for increasing financial investment and policy focus on education provision (Levine, Lloyd, Greene, *et al.* 2008; Herz, 2006; Pandey, 2004). Investment in education is regarded as the main way through which nations and their citizens can move towards long-term development goals and improve both social and economic standards of living (King and Hill, 1993). Education of girls and thus the future of women is seen as key to securing intergenerational transfers of knowledge, and hence providing long-term gender equality, enhanced per capita income and social change (DFID, 2005). Global discourses on education highlight the instrumental value of education as central to this debate for securing investments in female education (Subrahmanian, 2002). However, along with the instrumentalist rationale, the intrinsic value of education for girls and women is also discussed (Sen, 2000; Nusbbam, 2000). The latter regard the return of education, for individuals as equally important as the social rate of return. Sen, through his capability

approach, suggests that both boys and girls should have access to 'adequate' education to enable them to develop their capacities for informed and rational choices and to have increased agency. This, Sen (2000) argues, will help individuals to lead the lives they value. Thus girls' participation in elementary education is considered a first step towards achieving equality.

Many scholars have argued that education is generally beneficial for all and that there is a positive correlation between education and socio-economic status (Karade, 2009; Sedwal and Kamat, 2008; Chatterjee, 2000; Kurane, 1999; Sharma, 1996)[23]. Such human capital theory has, however, been criticised for stressing the role of education in influencing economic production while ignoring its role in advancing the well-being and freedom of people, and hence its role in influencing social change (Sen, 1999 in Saito 2003). The capability approach, as proposed by Amartya Sen, focuses on the relationship between the resources people have and what they can do with those resources. He applies the concepts of functionings and capabilities to illustrate his arguments. While functionings are actual achievements, capabilities are the freedoms to achieve, that is, 'the alternative combinations' of things a person is able to do or be (Sen, 1999: 75).

Much feminist research has engaged with the existence of gendered inequality in education by seeking to explain why these inequalities continue to exist. Effectively, feminist research has become a catalyst for change, particularly in our understanding of the nature and impact of education on women's lives. The equal opportunities approach dominated the field of gender and education in 1990s, with its concern for equal rights, equal access and participation, freedom of choice and the removal of sex discrimination (see Arnot, David and Weiner, 1999). Sex-role socialisation theory, interested in sex stereotyping, offered the possibility of uncovering the ways in which boys and girls were being prepared for their assigned roles in society. It complemented the concern for equal rights since it revealed the innumerable and often quite subtle ways in which society channels each generation into rather narrow and conventional sex roles (Arnot and Dillabough, 2000). Such patterns of socialisation whether found in the family, amongst peer groups or in educational institutions obstruct girls' full development. Nussbaum explores the reproduction of subordinate gender identity with especial reference to

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[23]These researchers underline that education determines aspirations, productivity, and vertical and horizontal mobility.

developing countries. For her, the processes within gendered power relations direct women to value 'beings and doings' which undermines their empowerment and freedom in participation (Nussbaum, 2000: 135). Colclough, Pauline, and Tembon (2000) used a different approach by theorising that interactions between poverty at state and household level, and gender relations which operate in the domains of the household, the school, the labour market and society are the main reasons why some children in general and girls in particular do not attend school.

Much of the early work on girls' schooling in developing countries relied heavily on quantitative procedures (Unterhalter, 2003). The units of analysis, Unterhalter argues, included household members' characteristics and possessions, infrastructure, school provision and management, neglecting the school processes and educational outcomes. However, there has been a trend shift with more focus being given to women's empowerment through education from the turn to the twenty-first century. Scholars such as Heward and Bunwaree (1999), Unterhalter, Rajagopalan and Challender (2005) and international organisations such as UNESCO (2005 and 2003), UNICEF (2005), UNDP (2006 and 2003), and Global Campaign for Education (2003) have brought the gender agendas in education to the global forum and explored its practicalities in implementation. Unterhalter, Rajagopalan and Challender (2005) proposed a 'scorecard' to measure gender equality and girls' participation in education with special reference to Asia. Thus a crucial aspect of the current debate in gender and education is achieving gender equality in education.

Gender and development

The current discourse on gender and development focuses on providing agency to enhance female wellbeing (Sen, 2000). Sen believes that female wellbeing could be improved by increasing their participation in public-sphere activities. Achieving gender equality, Sen argues, is the most powerful strategy to achieve development. Development is conceived by Sen as the expansion of individual capabilities for reasoned choice. He propagates the equitable distribution of capabilities rather than wealth or primary goods. Capabilities symbolize freedom and opportunities given to individuals to make their own informed and rational choices. This in turn will result in achieving development for any nation. The emphasis here is on state's social obligations for increasing political, social and economic freedoms which require investment in health, education and social security for all. Thus it

is important for women to enjoy their rights and responsibilities as citizens and women's empowerment is the key for achieving equal citizenship and thereby both individual and national wellbeing.

It is argued that girls' participation in education will improve national development indicators such as lower infant and maternal mortality, lower fertility rates, longer life expectancy, improvement in conditions of health, nutrition and economic growth (Herz and Sperling, 2004; Pandey, 2004; Jeffery and Basu, 1996). Families with educated women have the advantage of better health, higher income and an increased chance of educational attainment for the next generation. With this philosophy in mind the women in development (WID) framework emphasises bringing women into development through, for instance, school and stresses the expansion of educational facilities for girls and women. Education of women is the key for long-term gender equality and social change. However, Unterhalter (2005: 17) argues that though WID stresses greater participation of girls and women in education and in the process of development plans, it does not challenge the 'multiple sources of women's subordination'. These include injustice and inequality girls and women face in the family and the workplace. She further argues that this approach was found to dominate the discourse in policy documents in the 1990s including that of World Bank and UNIESCO. Thus the emphasis on increasing facilities for girls' schooling to maximise 'social benefits' came to the fore and the personal and private benefits of girls' and women's education remained unacknowledged (Unterhalter, 2005).

In contrast, the gender and development (GAD) approach initiated in the late 1980s, concentrated on the discourse of power imbalances embedded in society and its impact on girls' education. This approach was considered to be more appropriate in the context of developing countries such as India where the 'sexual division of labour inside and outside the household' is very obvious (Unterhalter, 2005: 21). GAD, as argued by Unterhalter, focuses more on challenging the deep-rooted gender discrimination (Kabeer, 1994) that pervades society, based on the belief that gender equality can be achieved through programmes that initiate and restore the power balance between the genders by eliminating 'structural barriers to gender equality' (Unterhalter, 2005: 22). GAD theorists emphasise the significance of gendered power structures of inequality in a range of contexts and they argue that inequality needs to be challenged politically (Unterhalter, 2005).

In tune with multilateral and international organisations such as the World Bank, the Indian national educational policy discourse portrays women's empowerment as a national priority (Government of India, 2002b). It perceives a strong relationship between education and socio-economic development. Further, education is considered a tool to eradicate inequalities on the basis of gender, caste or class (Government of India, 2000; Government of India, 1992). Education is valued for both its instrumental contribution in nation-building and its intrinsic contribution to increasing agency and choice through the realisation of human potential. However, Ramachandran (2003a) observes that irrespective of the policy statements, the educational programmes in India emphasise the WID approach and concentrate on increasing access to school, mostly physical, for girls by introducing incentives and opening more schools. This ignores issues such as community mobilisation through which the deep-rooted gender discrimination that permeates society could be eliminated. Unterhalter (2005) argues that though issues such as community mobilisation were incorporated in the policy discourse, it remained mostly an end in itself in developing countries. Therefore feminist researchers stress indicators to measure the 'actual level of attainment towards gender equality and women's empowerment' rather than focusing merely on access to schooling (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2005).

Having briefly outlined the theoretical debates on gender and education and gender and development that informed my research I now turn to my review of the literature on girls' education. I shall begin by discussing the gender gap in education and then outline gender constraints in education participation. In so doing, I focus on research concerning the developing countries in general and India in particular. The literature on gender and education related to developed countries and the countries in the west are not considered, as I think that the problems faced by the developing countries and the developed countries in the field of girls' education are in many respects rather different. While in the developed countries a key issue concerns differences in the learning levels between the sexes as well as pedagogical practices (Davies, 2003; Bell, Morrow and Tastsoglou, 1999; Ellsworth, 1989), gendered teacher expectations (Coffey and Delamont, 2000; Dillabough, 1999) etc., the developing countries are still struggling to put girls into and to retain them at school in the first place. While focusing on the literature related to barriers of girls' education, I have also looked at the status of women in society, as perceptions of society towards girls' education are dependent in part on the status of its women.

In considering these issues, I examined a range of different sources including reports by transnational agencies, academic articles, and working papers by scholars in the field of girls' education. Reports pertaining to the status of girls' education and the reasons for their non-participation in school by UNESCO, UNDP, DFID, UNICEF and OXFAM tend to be generic and less specific in nature, less analytic and less focussed on a certain region. They indicate mostly changing policies at the national level (Shel, 2007). Some studies use secondary sources as data (e.g. Roy and Khan, 2003; Karlekar, 2000; Sudarshan, 2000). Few of the studies carried out interviews and/or observations to get more personal and individual perspectives on the matter, either through one-on-one interviews and/or through focus group discussions with different stakeholders such as students, teachers and administrators (Jha and Jhingran, 2005; Page, 2005a; Ramachandran, 2004b). This is where my research makes an original contribution to knowledge in that it is based on primary empirical material in the form of qualitative interviews with relevant stakeholders.

The gender gap in education

The issue of education has been given increasing prominence in the development agenda of international organisations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, World Vision and DFID over recent decades. These agencies have tried to accelerate the process to achieve universal elementary education by emphasising the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, Kabeer (2003) found that such targets which represent the views of the international and the national community do not necessarily bear any relation to the views of local communities and families in developing countries, who take the decision regarding girls' participation in school. This fact becomes clear when we analyse the situation of girls' and women's education over the last five decades.

King and Hill (1993), while evaluating the status of women's education and the extent of the gender gap in education in 152 developing countries spread over five regions during the period 1960 to 1985, found that the status of female education was at its lowest in the poorest countries. They observed that though the school enrolment rate had risen in developing countries, it did not minimise the existing disparities across the genders. Their data which effectively end in the mid–1980s, predate my research by some twenty-five years. They suggest that all South Asian countries other than Sri Lanka had lower enrolment rates for girls than boys in primary education (King and Hill, 1993). They also found that in countries with a low and lower-middle economic status, less than 60 percent

of children who enter school stay only up to primary cycle. On average, 9.6 percent of girls in comparison to 8.2 percent of boys leave primary school in countries with a low income (King and Hill, 1993: 6). The dropout rate was found to be higher for girls in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa compared to other regions.

More recent data pertaining to girls' participation in school analysed by UNESCO (2003) and UNICEF (2006) supports King and Hill's observation from the 1980s. Though the school enrolment rate has shown upward movement in developing countries, disparities between the genders still persist. Gender inequalities remain greatest in Sub-Saharan Africa as well as in South and West Asia (UNESCO, 2003). The Education For All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2003) points out that the three regions where gender inequalities are the greatest – Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States and South and West Asia – are the home of three quarters of the total of out-of-school children of the globe. The report argues that 'gender equality in education will not be possible without wider social change in many societies' (UNESCO, 2003: 116). The UNESCO (2005) report highlights that South Asia has the second highest share of out-of-school girls (56%). It claims that India has the highest number of out-of-school children in absolute terms, indicating that one out of four children in India do not attend school. In Bangladesh, one out of five primary school-age children are out of school. Further, the report, with the help of household survey data, asserts that for every 100 boys of primary school age who are out of school, there are 136 girls in that situation in India, whereas in the South Asia region there are 129 out-of-school girls to every 100 boys. The report points out that concerted efforts are needed and 'policies and interventions must be tailored on nationally-specific contexts' (UNESCO, 2005: 57) to combat this problem.

The efforts at international and regional level to maximise the process of achieving gender equality in universal elementary education have percolated to national levels. This becomes pertinent when we look at the progress made by India in the field of education in the 1990s. Other than improving access to schooling, efforts were also made to increase the absolute number of teachers in general and female teachers in particular, to do away with single-teacher schools, and to increase the proportion of women teachers in schools (Ramachandran, 2003a). The country witnessed a decadal jump (1991–2001) of 13.17 percent for men and 14.87 percent for women in literacy rates. The enrolment of children in the age group 6-11 went up from 97.4 million in 1991 to 113.8 million in 2001, with the

girls' percentage increasing from 41.48 percent in 1991 to 43.76 percent in 2001 (Ramachandran, 2003a). This improvement in the enrolment rates was the result of an increase in the establishment of educational infrastructures in the country. However, the progress at upper primary level was not as remarkable (Ramachandran, 2003a; Kingdon, 2007). Even though there has been a slight shift in raising enrolment, the average number of years girls remain in school is only 1.8 years and of the 80 million children in the 6-14 age-groups who are out of school, about 60 percent are girls. Though there is improvement in the enrolment and retention of children in school, a major gap still persists between the genders (Ramachandran, 2004b). Furthermore, attendance and retention rates are not satisfactory. Despite the greater availability of schools to girls in India, Ramachandran (2004b) realises that a lot more needs to be done in the field of education to encourage girls' participation.

The figure for the national average covers up poor performances in certain geographical areas. The UNESCO report (2005) provides further support for this. It suggests an even bleaker picture regarding girls' education in India. It argues that the fact that India has the world's largest number of out-of-school children (27 million) has an enormous impact on the global level of gender disparities. India alone accounts for 23 percent of the global total of out-of-school children. The UNESCO (2007) report suggests that the actual number of out-of-school children in India could be even more owing to the fact that administrative data underestimate the number of children who are not receiving effective schooling. Roy and Khan (2003) looked at the issue of 'more positive reporting' of enrolled children and argued that the pressure to declare a programme a success leads to over-reporting of results. Roy and Khan also argue that the goals and targets set at international level do not consider specific local problems and thus put tremendous pressure on governments to pursue unrealistic targets. Implementers at local level then end up over-reporting data in order to avoid the demand for explanations for not fulfilling the targets.

Gender Achievements and Prospects in Education, the GAP report of UNICEF (2005b), lamented that the first deadline of the Millennium Development Goals – gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005 - remained unmet. The governments of all the countries admitted that none of the MDGs could be achieved without significant progress in girls' education. The report warned that meeting the gender parity goals in education was the crux of achieving all other goals whether related to health or poverty. The report articulated concerns that the countries belonging to the South Asia region lag far behind and need

considerable enhancement of their pace of progress to achieve the goals. The 11th working paper of DFID on *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment* (Rose and Subrahmanian, 2005) also states that despite concerted efforts made in the last decade, girls' enrolment, retention and attendance at elementary schooling still lags behind that of boys. Rose and Subrahmanian argue that the challenge is particularly severe in South Asia, where, in total, girls comprise 57 percent of those out of school and the gender gap in enrolment widens at the elementary level. Understanding the factors that constrain girls' education participation helps us to understand this persisting gender gap in education.

Gender constraints in education participation

In recent times, a growing number of studies have examined the factors constraining girls' education (Page, 2005a; Colclough, 2004; Ramachandran, 2003a; Bhattacharya, 2002; Chanana, 2001; Karleker, 2000; Sudarshan, 2000; Sinha, 2000; Bunwaree 1999; Rose and Tembon, 1999; Subrahmanian; 1999). Here the unit of analysis is the family and social relations. These studies focus on the cultures of the home and the school, while others include that of society (Colclough, 2004; Chanana, 2001; Karlekar, 2000) and the economy (Sudarshan, 2000 and Sinha, 2000).The concepts of culture in the above studies are based on knowledge and ideas; cultural practices and ceremonies; beliefs; attitudes and perceptions; values and norms; societal expectations; gender stereotypes and socialisation.

The above mentioned studies have identified, in different ways, a number of socio-cultural factors and their effects on girls' education. Some have established that the correlation between gender and education goes beyond economic issues. A considerable literature exploring the constraints of girls' education suggests that these fall under broad interrelated and mutually reinforcing categories such as family background, socio-cultural, and school-related factors which I shall discuss next.

Family background

Researchers (Kabeer, 2003; Rajaram and Sunil, 2003) provide valuable insights into the importance of the household as 'the site where key decisions regarding the education of children are taken' (Kabeer, 2003: n. p.). A growing body of literature has emphasised the socio-economic circumstances of the family as a main constraint on girls' education. They point to low household income (Kumar, 2006b; Jha and Jhaingran, 2005; Page, 2005a; Rana and Das, 2004; Kaul, 2001; Colclough, Pauline and Tembon, 2000; Epstein, 1998;

Mason and Khandker, 1996 in Bredie and Beeharry, 1998) and the direct and hidden costs of schooling (UNESCO, 2003; Ramachandran, 2003a and 1998; De Vreyer, 1993 in Bredie and Beehary, 1998; Appleton, 1991 in Bredie and Beehary, 1998; Brown, 1991) as the main reasons for the non-enrolment of children in general and girls in particular in school. It is argued that though schooling has been made free, for girls there are some hidden costs (Ramachandran, 2003a). For example girls have to be dressed well for school to maintain their modesty. The GAP report (UNICEF, 2005b) points out that the main obstacle that continues to undermine efforts to get girls into school is poverty. Brown (1991) argues that children's participation in economic activities to improve the earnings of their family keep them away from school. Likewise, mothers' going to work for long hours necessitates girls' engagement in domestic chores. Girls are always required at the home front and play a critical role in the household (Page, 2005a). Girls are used by poorer families to look after younger siblings and to undertake household chores in the absence of their mother who has to go out to contribute to the family income. The frequent migration of families, as argued by Brown, in search of greater economic opportunities also affects the education of children adversely. Most studies found the use of girls at home and for household work influenced the decision of the family and parents to keep them at home rather than sending them to school (Jha and Jhingran, 2005; Page, 2005a; Rajaram and Sunil, 2003; Roy and Khan, 2003). Opportunity cost in the form of the family's need for a child's labour is repeatedly cited as a reason for not sending children to school (Mishra, 2005; Ramachandran, 2003b; Colclough, Rose, and Tembon, 2000; Sinha, 2000). These studies found that opportunity costs of girls' education were higher than those of boys especially for households with poor economic conditions.

A further important family-based issue in girls' education is the number of members in a household and the birth order of a girl. These significantly influence her chance of being enrolled and remaining in school. Ramachandran (2003b; 2004b) found that both the number of members in a household and the birth order of girls are highly correlated with their chance of not entering school or their early departure from school. Being the oldest in the family impedes the chance of attending school by a girl (Ramachandran, 2003a; Ramachandran, 2003b). She argues that later born children have greater chances of schooling as they are released from household chores and contributing financially to the family. Thus, it appears that though the siblings of lower birth order may benefit from the presence of a girl born first, it is the latter who suffers. Birth order here intertwines with

socio-cultural factors such as gender role expectations to shape girls' educational opportunities.

The decision to send a girl child to school is taken in the family. Such family decisions are influenced by broad social and institutional frameworks and the prevalent customs and practices. Jha and Jhingran's empirical study (2005) conducted in ten states of India revealed that gender disparities pervade all spheres of life and effect intra-familial attitudes and values. They argue that girls face discrimination in attending school due to various socio-cultural constraints.

Socio-cultural factors

Stephens (2000: 33) observed that 'from birth, a child's position within society is governed by specific rules and patterns of behaviours and by reciprocal duties, obligations and responsibilities' and argues that the gender of the child and the gendered nature of relations between family members define his/her identity and opportunity. This is particularly evident in the strongly patriarchal cultures that dominate in many developing countries, particularly in South Asia. Here patriarchy and its economic structures create conditions of 'all-round' dependency of women as a function of 'patrilineal principles of inheritance of property', a 'patriarchal structure of authority' and a 'patri-local system of marriage' (UNESCO, 2007). Gender inequality in education in these societies is a manifestation of the 'generalised and systematic discrimination against women and girls' (UNESCO, 2003: 119). The GAP report (UNICEF, 2005b) points out that the main obstacles to efforts to get girls into school are considered to be pre-conceived gender roles and cultural traditions. It calls for 'intersectoral approaches' and highlights the importance of 'national interventions over narrowly focused projects' (UNICEF, 2005b: 13) to counter the barriers to girls' education. Herz (2006) argues that because the benefits of girls' education become apparent at a later stage and are enjoyed by their in-laws' family, parents feel that 'the future returns may not justify the present costs' (Herz, 2006: ix). Education is regarded as not important from the point of view of the role a girl - and later a woman - plays in the family and society and thus sending her to school is considered waste of time and resources. Brown (1991) had already pointed out that cultural factors can prevent girls from entering school. Through a survey conducted in Togo, she found that families were reluctant to keep girls at school as they considered this a waste of money, since the girls would move out of their parents' house after marriage. The belief and feeling that 'girls belong to their husband's family' has serious implications for the

decisions of families regarding their daughters' schooling (Jha and Jhingran, 2005; Page, 2005a; Sudarshan, 2000). Parents tend to invest in the education of their sons since they remain in the natal family and not in that of girls as they will join another family on marriage. It is therefore not surprising that studies have found that there is parental preference of sons over their daughters especially when faced with a decision to choose among the children whom to send to school (Thornton, 2006; UNDP, 2006; Jha and Jhingran, 2005; Page, 2005a; Raynor, 2005) since sons inherit family property as well as the responsibility of the family. To avoid social criticism for educating girls beyond 'customary levels' and when the quality of education is not satisfactory, parents tend not to send their girls to school. Levine, Lloyd, Greene, *et al.*'s (2008) findings, among others, include girls' engagement in domestic chores, caring for younger children, early marriage and childbearing which put them in a vicious cycle which continues generation after generation.

Related to this, Jha and Jhingran's study (2005) found that Indian men were less likely to want to marry women who were more educated than themselves. The maintenance of male sovereignty in the family requires that husbands are more educated than their wives. This leads parents to aspire to lower levels of education for their daughters. Daughters with a higher level of education incur higher dowry expenses for parents. As parents have to pay more dowries for more educated grooms, they prefer to keep their girls out of school from early on. The practice of dowry acts against girls' education (Jha and Jhingran, 2005).

Girls are married off at an early age for both cultural and economic reasons (Herz, 2006; Colclough, 2004; Karlekar, 2000; Sudarshan, 2000; Colclough, Pauline and Tembon, 2000). These studies highlight that due to the cultural importance attached to marriage and the shame attached to pregnancy before marriage, parents tend to give their daughters in marriage as soon as they attain puberty or even earlier. They assert that the practice of early marriage is the manifestation of various cultural beliefs, social circumstances and economic pressure. There is a strong belief that girls should not be kept unmarried after they attain puberty. This is due to parents' concern for the sexual safety of girls. Page (2005a and 2005b) found that this factor holds true in India. Parents in her studies were suspicious of sending their daughters to school as school offers a chance to interact with boys. The fear that girls would be sexually harassed made their parents withdraw them from school and marry them off early. Lloyd and Mensch (2006) explore in detail the potential importance of marriage and childbirth as determinants of school-leaving in the sub-Saharan Africa region.

Their data indicate that early marriage and early childbirth limit girls' educational horizons. These findings may not hold true in the Indian context, as far as pregnancy as a reason for school leaving is concerned. However, the findings related to early marriage as a reason for school-leaving by girls, has resonances in the Indian scenario. Here it is due to the fear of their getting exposed to pre-marital sex that girls are married off before they complete school education. Karlekar (2000) quotes official statistics related to child marriage in India, stating that out of the 4.5 million marriages that take place per year, at least 3 million involve girls that belong to the age group 15-19 years. The magnitude of the problem of child marriage and thereby denying education to girls can be measured by the fact that 'few marriages in India are formally registered [as] religious ceremonies are regarded as socially if not legally binding' (UPI, June 23, 2005: n. p.).

Aikman and Unterhalter's (2005) contribution to the 'Beyond Access' series critically examines the policies and practices in developing countries which are unfavourable towards achieving gender equality in education and reveals the 'complex interrelationships between …, cultural and ethnic differences, geographical marginalisation and gender inequalities, which are obscured by nationally aggregated statistics' (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2005: 6). Their work initiates a debate about some of the challenges of achieving gender equality in education and indicates that 'there are no quick fixes to the deep-rooted and often widely accepted forms of gender discrimination that affect education and schooling' (2005: 247).

The interaction between gender and cultural categories is also the focus of Lewis and Lockheed's (2007) work. They argue that factors such as gender, ethnicity, race and poverty contribute to girls' low educational participation and they term this 'multiple exclusion'. We might describe such an approach in terms of intersectionality in that it sees the intersection of multiple factors as impacting on girls' education rather than a single, dominant factor. Such approaches, taking a complex view of girls' education, have become increasingly common. As part of this, there is a growing strand of literature (Jha and Jhigran, 2005; Page, 2005a; Rajaram and Sunil, 2003; Karlekar, 2000) analysing the factors affecting girls' access to education from the point of view of the dynamics of the family and the facilities provided by the government such as school, which I shall now discuss.

School-related factors

A number of studies have highlighted that there are two key factors related to the school as a material and socio-cultural entity that affect girls' education. These are mostly related to

school supply and quality for example, the availability of schools, resources, teachers, structures and facilities that influence girls' enrolment and persistence in schools. Historically the distance of the school from girls' habitation was identified as one significant factor affecting their access to education (Rose and Subrahmanian, 2005; Karlekar, 2000; Brown, 1991). Karlekar (2000) found that of the 36 percent of girls in her sample who never attended school, many cited 'the absence of a neighbourhood school as the major reason' (2000: 85). However, simultaneously in 2000 Aggarwal argued that the presence of a school closer to their habitation does not ensure that all children, especially all girls, attend school. Karlekar (2000) further suggested that the unfavourable environment at school affects girls' education adversely. She observed that even the availability of a school in close proximity to girls' homes did not always ensure the enrolment and retention of girls. Her study, conducted in a southern state of India, found that even though there was a school within a radius of one kilometre of the habitation, girls' dropout rate was still recorded at 50 percent. These findings reveal the fact that the mere presence of a school does not ensure girls' participation (UNESCO, 2009; Ramachandran, 2003a and 2003b) and indicate the importance of the safe school environment, effective teachers, dynamic classrooms and a gender sensitive atmosphere to ensure girls' participation (UNESCO, 2009, 2008, and 2007).

The concern over girls' security dissuades parents from sending their girls to school if they have to travel long distances. Brown (1991) found that there is a fear of 'danger' facing adolescent girls outside the boundaries of their home which pervades parents. Thus 'control of girls' sexuality' (1991: 59) becomes a major concern of families, and not their education. As is evident from the DFID report (Rose and Subrahmanian, 2005), parents' security concerns include the possibility of girls being abused by male teachers and male fellow students. Some studies have found girls to be prone to sexual abuse by teachers (Levine, Lloyd, Greene *et al*., 2008; Lloyd and Mensch, 2006; Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, and Ellsberg, *et al*. 2005; Jewkes, Levin, and Mbananga, *et al*. 2002). Lloyd *et al*. (2000) and Human Rights Watch (2001) also found harassment of girls by fellow male students to be a deterrent to girls' schooling. Unterhalter (2003) shows how schoolgirls in South Africa are deprived of schooling because of sexual harassment by their teachers and fellow male students. Along with a fear of safety, the lack of transportation facilities and the cost of transportation, if available, heighten this problem (Rose and Subrahmanian, 2005).

One of factors that influence girls' enrolment and retention in school is the lack of role models in the form of female teachers. Several studies found that the absence of female teachers in schools, especially in rural areas, is a hindrance to girls' schooling (Jha and Jhigran, 2005; Raynor, 2005; Ramachandran, 2003b; Colclough, Pauline, and Tembon, 2000; Karlekar, 2000). They argue that the presence of role models is likely to encourage parents to send their daughters to school. Additionally, as Karlekar, and Jha and Jhingran point out the presence of female teachers assures girls' security in the school.

Apart from the physical distance of the school and safety issues, the quality of the teaching and learning that the school has impact on girls' continuation in school. The functioning of the school in a more qualitative manner was also viewed as critical to sustaining girls in it. Studies on the effect of school quality on girls' retention indicate a significant positive correlation between the absence of quality teaching and learning in school with that of an increased dropout of adolescent girls (Jha and Jhingran, 2005; Page, 2005a; Rampal, 2005 and 2004; Ramachandran, 2003b). Parents tend to withdraw their daughters from school if they feel that schooling does not provide meaningful learning. A debate about the quality of education provided to the children of 'the masses' in India has been initiated by feminist researchers (Sadgopal, 2008; Rampal, 2005; Leclercq, 2003; Ramachandran and Saihjee, 2002) who argue that in the name of alternative arrangements to offer quick access to the so far unreached children, the government has provided low-cost options where 'the children of the masses are compelled to receive sub-standard education' (Rampal, 2005: 1-2). With regard to rural girls living in remote areas and communities with low literacy, researchers (Rampal, 2005; Roy and Khan, 2003) emphasise the need to provide the best facilities as 'only the best can counter the historical accumulation of disadvantage that these groups were born into' (Roy and Khan, 2003: 3). In the context of rural areas Jha and Jhingran (2005), Raynor (2005), Ramachandran (2004b), among others argue that due to a lack of relevance of school education to rural life parents are inclined to either not enrol or withdraw their daughters from school early. Nonetheless, notwithstanding social, economic and cultural factors, the presence of a well-run school can help surmount most of those barriers (Ramachandran, 2003a).

A series of studies (Karlekar, 2000; Kingdon and Dreze, 1999; PROBE, 1999) indicates factors that positively influence girls' school participation such as 'mid-day meals, infrastructural quality, teacher regularity, parent-teacher cooperation, and the number of

teachers per child' (Kingdon and Dreze, 1999: 25). Furthermore, they argue that child care provision improves girls' attendance in school (Ramachandran, 2003b; Karlekar, 2000; Rajagopal, 2000) by releasing them from the burden of sibling care and thus encouraging their greater participation in school.

Having considered the corpus of literature analysing the constraints on girls' schooling I now turn my attention to the Indian context of gender and schooling.

Gender and education: The Indian context
Elementary education in India has come to occupy an important place within the current discourse of development. Scholarly and activist interventions of recent times have brought to attention the changing course of debates on access and equity in public education (Sadgopal, 2003; Dreze and Sen, 2002). The discourse on gender, education, and development in India during the early 1990s was dominated by concern over access to schooling and the facilities provided for girls' greater participation in school, mostly within a quantitative framework (Page, 2005a), ignoring the history of women's struggle for inclusion and their fight against the patriarchal gender order (Manjrekar, 2003). Policy analysis most often framed the relationship between gender and education in simple, linear terms and, hence, the solutions posited within policy often stopped at 'providing' access to schools for girls without reflecting on the structural issues that result in the unfair power relationships between women and men (Chanana, 2006). Although access is important in thinking about education, scholars argue that feminist intervention in education has focused on the patriarchal basis of schools, the curriculum as well as instruction (Chanana, 2006; Sadgopal, 2003; Karlekar, 2000). Given the prevalent patriarchal attitudes about girls' education, they believe that providing only access to elementary education is equivalent to not encouraging girls' participation in schools.

The literature, however, suggests a changing trend by the end of the 1990s and the beginning of 2000, addressing concerns of girls and women with more emphasis on greater gender equity, policy provisions to put mechanisms in place for achieving women's empowerment and gender equality, and the implementation of these provisions in actual practice. Though the initial concern of development was conceptualised in economic terms and education was perceived as key for human capital more recently

there has been a greater focus on equality and women's empowerment. This shift is in line with that of global gender concerns which have also shifted from merely 'securing equal numbers of girls and boys the same amount of schooling' to 'much wider notions of gender equality in education' (Unterhalter, 2008: 31).

Gender discrimination and the status of women in India have been investigated by feminists who argue that women to this day have a very low status in Indian society (Ramachandran, 2004b, 2003a and 2003b; Sudarshan, 2000; Basu and Ray, 1990). Basu and Ray suggest that child marriage and polygamy which were prominent practices during the nineteenth century were the reasons for the low status of women. They point out that gendered power relations are still entrenched in settings such as rural areas, where girls and women are controlled by their parents, husbands and in-laws. This situation is presumed to be 'natural' (Kumar, 1993). Women are confined to the house and have almost no scope or opportunity for self-expression. It is because of these facts that the reform activities were mainly, in the beginning, aimed at educating women, as education was considered key to their salvation. The focus later shifted to social reform after the realisation that without eradicating practices such as child marriage and the prevention of widow remarriage, women's education could not be promoted. Thus, the authors argue, the social reform organisations concentrated their activities on raising the age of marriage for girls and boys, abolishing the systems of *sati*[24] and of *purdah*[25], education of women through reform of the curriculum based on national needs, demanding the establishment of teacher training institutions, the recruitment of more women teachers and revising textbooks to make them more attractive and useful for girls. However, according to the authors, by the end of the 20th century, it was realised that the rural areas were still neglected and the educational needs of girls and women from the poor economic strata had yet to be addressed fully. Whilst one main focus of women's struggle is to describe changes in the legislature necessary to promote the education of women, the text does not address the problematic of encouraging girls into education and maintaining them there when the relevant legislature is in place. The persistence of the under-education of girls in India suggests that legislation by itself cannot address that issue and that other barriers are in place which prevent the full participation of all girls in education.

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[24]*Sati*: The traditional Hindu practice of self-immolation of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre, widely practiced from the medieval period until the18th century in India.
[25]*Purdah*: The practice that requires women to cover their bodies and conceal their form from men and in public places.

The state's efforts from the perspective of policy formulation to ensure 'free and compulsory education' for all children of 6 to 14 years have been reviewed by researchers (Rampal, 2005; Sadgopal, 2003) who conclude that the state has to revisit its policies and 'economic equations of efficiency' and 'look more critically at quality and equality of education' (Rampal, 2005: 20). As Kumar (2006) states, the postcolonial project of schooling in India was based on nationalist and modernist frameworks that aimed at achieving national integration through education. The state made a commitment to 'free and compulsory education for all children,' and became the major provider of education. Although public schooling, as Kumar (2006) argues, opened up participatory spaces for the masses, it reproduced social and gender inequality. Sudarshan (2000) maps gender disadvantage in Indian education from girls' and women's perspective by providing a historical record, from the independence of India in 1947 to 2000, of the evolving policy and programme scenario in the field of education. She assesses the argument of resource constraint in school education by examining the critical issue of investment and resource gaps and concludes that the resources required to improve the educational scenario in India are well within reach. The factors related to policy issues and system level interventions that create a well-run school are highlighted by Jha and Jhingran (2005). Their study indicates that inadequate legal frameworks and a lack of enforcement of existing laws and policies relating to education in areas such as compulsory education, child labour, the banning of corporal punishment and school fees and incentives for girls' education add to the magnitude of the problem. Page whilst measuring the policy discourse on gender and development in India and its reflection of on-the-ground, states that though 'women's empowerment is presented as a national priority' the policy vision has not translated onto the ground (2005b: 1). These findings support Aikman and Unterhalter's (2005) suggestion that a strong political will and leadership is important to bring about change.

Much literature focuses on the subordinate status of girls and women in the family and in society (Chanana, 2006; Nussbaum, 2000; Sudarshan, 2000) and the powerful role of family and kinship in influencing girls' life options. Girls' upbringing across class and caste is a preparation for their subordination to males (Kakar, 1988; Madan, 1993). Thus it is believed that in the Indian context, the stance on women's education and gender sensitisation will be meaningful only when it is informed by a socio-cultural and historical perspective on gender (Sadgopal, 2003). As Stromquist puts it:

> Substantial differences still exist in understanding the causes of educational (and social) inequalities and therefore in the nature of the solution. At one end we have educators and politicians who envision a within-the-school set of changes, … At the other end we have many social scientists who think that solving inequality necessitates interventions in society as a whole …The two proposals are not mutually exclusive; in practice, however, most measures to combat inequality have concentrated on school and have been piecemeal. (2006: 21)

Stromquist's statement holds true in the Indian context and suggests that girls' access to education depends on a number of issues, some of which relate directly to the availability of facilities whereas others depend on wider socio-cultural issues. Researchers argue that the goals of education often come into conflict with views about femininity and feminine roles that prevail in a given developing society such as India (Chanana, 2006; Jha and Jhingran, 2005; Page, 2005a; Pande, 2003; Rajaram and Sunil, 2003). This suggests that gender equality and women's empowerment cannot be achieved until the entrenched imbalances in gender power are removed. Enabling such a change process is challenging and requires significant effort beyond the immediate school context.

To understand some of the gendered processes at play in society in relation to girls' absence from school I, in the next section, draw on Pierre Bourdieu's (1992 and 1984) theory of practice that informed my research to explain how gendered identity is constructed. By so doing I focus on his theoretical conjectures about the connections between power, capital, and education and his concept of 'habitus' as a determinant affecting girls' participation in school education.

Conceptualizing habitus as a determinant of issues affecting girls' education in India
The persistence of inequalities of privilege and power in society is recognised by Bourdieu who engages with that persistence through the notion of 'cultural capital'. For him inequalities continue intergenerationally without conscious recognition and any public resistance toward them. He shows how cultural resources can be used to perpetuate individuals' and groups' privileged position over others. Bourdieu argues that social hierarchy gets consolidated in the formal school system. Different *pedagogic actions* tend to reproduce the culture of the privileged and thus contribute to the production of power relations which put such cultural characteristics into the dominant position (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 and Bourdieu, 1984). He argues that schools consecrate social as well as gender distinctions by constituting them as academic distinctions, employing them as

legitimate without the awareness of their social consequences (Bourdieu, 1984). His notion of *habitus* proposes that educational choices are often dispositional rather than conscious calculations which lead individuals to reproduce status distinctions (Bourdieu in Swartz, 1998: 187). Bourdieu demonstrates that masculine domination is assumed as natural and self-evident because of its inscription in the structure of the social world which is incorporated and reproduced in the habitus of individuals (Bourdieu, 1992). He considers this the paradigm of 'symbolic domination, namely gender inequality' (1992: 170). The question arises here whether or not schooling in India tends to perpetuate such gender differences? Do parents regard their daughters' future as home makers and mothers as natural and inevitable by channelling them towards their future role as care givers? Do girls themselves accept, consciously or otherwise, such cultural norms?

Bourdieu's concepts related to field, habitus and capital are useful for analysing the broader system of social relations in which girls' and women's activities derive their meanings. This theory regards culture as a medium through which activities or practices are realised. Bourdieu views culture as the product of human activity, expressed and reproduced only in practice (Grenfell and James, 1998). This is articulated in his theory of practice as summarized by Grenfell and James:

> Social agents are incorporated bodies who possess, indeed, are possessed by structural, generative schemes which operate by orienting social practice. Practice ... is a cognitive operation: it is structured and tends to reproduce structures of which it is a product ... However, it comes about, not so much through replication of action but its reproduction. Reproduction implies both variation and limitation in what is and is not possible in the behaviour, thought and physical action of people (Grenfell and James, 1998: 12).

For Bourdieu, human action is constituted through a dialectical relationship between individuals' thought and activity – their habitus - and the objective world – the field (Bourdieu, 1992). 'Field' here refers to a structural system of social relations among individuals, institutions and groups (Grenfell and James, 1998). According to Bourdieu (1992) '[e]ach field is possessed of a relative autonomy from other fields, and is irreducible to the economy, refracting social forces and evaluating those within it according to its own internal structure or "rules of the game"' (in Shilling, 2004: 475). According to Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, *et al.* (1998) fields are not absolutely autonomous, for they exist in what Bourdieu calls the field of power, which is itself an aspect of class relations. The term habitus refers to a 'socially constituted system of "durable transposable" dispositions providing individuals with class-dependent, predisposed ways of categorising and relating to

familiar and novel situations' (Shilling, 2004: 475). Habitus is 'formed in the context of people's social locations, and inculcates in them a set of tastes, "schemas of perception, thought and action", and a "world view" based on, and reconciled to these positions' (in Shilling, 2004: 475). It may also get expressed through durable ways 'of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking' (Bourdieu, 1990, in Reay, 2004: 432). Although habitus is a 'generative scheme' applicable to the most varied areas of practice, it incorporates within it the 'necessary freedom inherent in its class condition' (Bourdieu, 1984: 170-171). Field and habitus are mutually constituting such that people actively create the society in which they live but at the same time the social world shapes the individual (Reay, 2004). Bourdieu's concept of habitus is helpful for understanding how parents, their daughters and teachers from rural areas and administrators of school education department, through daily interactions, display their dispositions towards gender and schooling and are shaped by those dispositions. Using habitus as a conceptual tool was helpful to me for looking beyond the day-to-day activities of the parents, girls, teachers, administrators and the community they live in to the reproduction of particular gender patterns over time and different contexts.

Bourdieu's work was useful for my research in terms of looking at the world at macro level, to understand how it is structured and how various forms of capital are used by individuals in day-to-day activities and why members in a given social set behave in accordance with certain expectations. This explained how human behaviour is socially, culturally, and historically based and was crucial to my research because as I shall demonstrate girls' schooling is significantly influenced socially, culturally, and historically. I think that as a theory of practice, Bourdieu's work offers a materially based approach to locate practical processes in their socio-cultural setting.

This chapter briefly outlined the existing theoretical debate on gender and education and gender and development. The exploration of Indian literature on gender and education suggests that though there is a shift of perception in policy terms to view education in terms of its intrinsic value, the educational programmes and their implementation process do not address the issue of imbalance in gendered power structures in Indian society.

Chapter 3
Methodology

This chapter focuses on the perspectives and methods I brought to bear on my research. I shall begin by outlining the setting in which I conducted my research. Here I describe the characteristics of the district, block and the villages I chose as my sample locations. Then I shall discuss the sample process that is, how I selected the households and respondents for my interviews. I then discuss my interviewing process and the process of conducting focus group discussions and the classroom observation that I did to generate my research data. I reflect on the issue of my identity as an insider and outsider while conducting this research and its implications for the data I created. Then I go on to discuss the ethical concerns that were important for my research and in particular how I addressed the matter of trust with my research participants. At the end, I describe the process I followed to handle the data which includes transcribing and translating my interviews. I also illustrate the challenges I faced in the field when conducting my fieldwork and the methods I adopted to handle those situations.

My research analyses the factors affecting the exclusion of girls from school education in India. In researching the lives of women and girls of central India I followed a feminist methodology which prioritises women's realities, views and participants' voices (Bryman, 2004; Stanley, 1990; Haraway, 1988). I chose this perspective because it enabled me to use a combination of methods for studying the subordination of women, and gender injustices. As argued by Ramazanoglu and Holland, 'it is not the investigation of gender, or gendered social lives, as such that makes a research project feminist. […] Research projects can be thought of as feminist if they are framed by feminist theory, and aim to produce knowledge that will be useful for the effective transformation of gendered injustice and subordination'(2002: 147). The fundamental goal of feminist research is to make women's experiences visible (Reinharz and Chase, 2003). This is what I intended to do.

My research takes 'people's accounts of their experiences as an indispensable element of the knowledge of gendered lives and actual decision-making process' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 127). The people whose voices and experiences matter the most in my study are those who are imbricated in girls' participation in education, specifically women, more specifically mothers of out-of-school girls and the out-of-school girls themselves. I

also interviewed a range of different men: 1) the fathers of out-of-school girls who, as will be discussed in chapter 5, have the utmost power to influence the final decision-making in terms of the inclusion or exclusion of girls in/from school education, 2) teachers, and 3) education administrators since all of them significantly and in different ways influence what happens with girls in relation to their schooling. As is evident from this brief summary description of my sample, men are the main decision-makers and office holders in the culture that I investigate.

Though a number of government sponsored programmes and strategies in India aim to enrol girls in school and to reduce gender inequality in school education, mainstream education has so far simultaneously and systematically excluded girls even though women are nearly half the population. Thus, taking a feminist methodological approach is critical in researching the gender factors influencing girls' participation in school in India. As Krook and Squires (2006) argue, there is no single feminist approach in terms of methods and methodology just as there is neither a single feminism nor a single feminist theory. Feminists have a consensus on two points: recognising gender as a key organiser of social life and the fact that they need to act to make the social world more equitable (Sprague, 2005). What makes feminist research different from other research is the commitment of the researcher to reduce gender imbalances and the inequality that exists within and outside the research process (Ladino, 2002). According to Asher (2001) and Dyck (2000), feminist researchers acknowledge the fundamentality of reflexivity, gender and identity in fieldwork experiences as the basis to address power imbalances. Identifying one's positioning in research is therefore crucial for researchers who get involved in fieldwork (Collins, 1999), and on a fundamental level reflexivity involves giving as full and honest an account of the research process as possible, in particular explicating the position of the researcher in relation to the researched (Reay, 1996: 443).

Hence, I shall discuss my role in this research in the first place. Second, in terms of the methods that I used in my fieldwork, I discuss my use of qualitative methods, e.g. in-depth interviewing and focus group discussions, to explore the gendered relations affecting girls' school education. Third, I examine the diverse identities I had to adopt due to my changing positions and insider and outsider status while doing my field investigation. I also discuss the power relations and ethical issues that I faced during my fieldwork. Finally, I reflect on the methods I used for the analyses of my data, the excavation of themes that shed light on

my research findings and the writing-up process. By so doing, I hope to make the 'how' of the research process, including the principles behind it, explicit as advocated by Griffin (2005), and to achieve 'transparency and overall accountability' as suggested by Doucet and Mauthner (2002: 125).

My research is cross-cultural. By this I mean that as an urbanised, educated outsider in rural India, my standpoint, which is influenced by western feminist discourse due to my exposure to UK academe, differs from that of the people of rural central India and may well 'other' them. Second, I am not a native of the place that I studied and my knowledge of the language popularly spoken in this area is somewhat limited. Third, I generated my data in Hindi and wrote my thesis in English, both of which are not my first language. My research shifted me between a range of cultures which I had to negotiate and I shall discuss these issues in this chapter.

Methods

The aim of my research is to understand the lives of girls and women in central India in respect of their exclusion from basic education. It also seeks to give voice to these girls and women. As stated, I used qualitative methods, in particular in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, as the aim was to generate and analyse material that 'seeks to uncover [the] meaning and understanding of experience' (Brayton, 1997: 2). My decision to use qualitative methods was also due to its 'valu[ing] subjective, personal meaning and definition, commonalities and giving voices to the oppressed' (Brayton, 1997: 2). Interviewing, as pointed out by Reinharz (1992), typically includes opportunities for clarification and discussion which the survey method excludes. Further, 'interviewing offers researchers an access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher' (Reinharz, 1992: 19). This aspect was particularly important for my study as my research involved girls and women from rural areas who have been marginalised on the basis of their gender, and interviewing allowed the scope to learn from these girls and women which worked as an antidote to generations of researchers ignoring their voice.

While interviewing I used a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix III) which gave me the opportunity for 'free interaction between me and my participants', exploring 'participants' views of reality' (Reinharz, 1992: 18). The use of this semi-structured

interview format encouraged my participants, especially women, to talk about gender stereotypes, a taken-for-granted issue. As Letherby (2003: 53) indicates: 'feminism does aim to deconstruct the taken for granted' issues.

There were certain practical dimensions which also influenced my decision to choose interviewing as my primary method of collecting data. Though I was aware of the potential issues of conducting in-depth interviews in the geographic area of my research (and I discuss these later in this chapter), I thought this is the only way to collect my respondents' perceptions of their life experiences. The reasons for this are twofold: first, I could not rely on quantitative secondary data from the district education department as they contained several discrepancies which I shall discuss below. The second reason involved the characteristics of my respondents at village level. 30 out of 38 of my respondents were from the villages. My interviewees at village level were the out-of-school girls and their parents who were mostly illiterates or just literates. This means that I could not have approached them with a questionnaire, particularly one they might have had to fill in. Third, the time limitation of my PhD did not allow me to use the participant observation method as in the case of my research topic it would have taken enormous time to observe village life over a period of time. So I adopted in-depth interviews as my primary approach as their scope provides 'understanding of an individual or a group perspective' as observed by Fontana and Frey (2008: 119). With this backdrop, I conducted the interviews along the lines of, as Mason (2002: 67) suggests, a 'conversation with a purpose'.

As a part of my research design I also used a brief questionnaire (see Appendix IV) which I filled in to collect information on the demographic profiles of my participants. The inclusion of the questionnaire and its structured format was particularly helpful to gather this information and made it more accessible for categorisation and analysis.

As well as interviewing, I decided to conduct focus group discussions to provide a common platform to the community members of my geographic research area where they could respond to and built on the views expressed by others in the group. Focus groups provide 'a synergistic approach produc[ing] a range of options, ideas and experiences, and thus generat[ing] insightful information' (Litoselliti, 2003: 2). As Gibbs puts it, 'the benefits of focus group research include gaining insights into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others

in a group situation' (1997: 1). The inclusion of focus groups in my study allowed me to obtain the views of community members who as will become clear in subsequent chapters also in a way influence the decision-making of individuals in the community. Litoselliti (2003) also suggests that focus groups are an appropriate method for obtaining information from illiterate communities. At the same time, I was conscious of the fact that 'because of the dynamics of the situation and the group; individual members may dominate while others may refrain from entering into the discussion' as pointed out by Flick (2006: 196). This situation may arise 'because of the additional fear of peer group disapproval' (Smithson, 2000 in Barbour, 2007: 34) among participants. This reminded me of the critical role I had to play as the moderator specially to ensure participation of each and every participant and to provide them with a chance to speak while avoiding favouring any particular group member.

The Setting

Having outlined the methods I used I now turn to explaining the setting where I conducted my research in order to situate my research participants in their context. The social, cultural and educational set-up of the participants is significant for understanding the constraints that I faced, the methods that I used and the strategies that I employed while doing my research.

I selected Ratlam district of the state of Madhya Pradesh in India as my area of study. The reasons for this choice were twofold. First, the typical position the district has in the state in the scenario of elementary education. I shall discuss this below. Second, my familiarity with the geographical, social and cultural set-up of the area made me feel more of an insider while doing my fieldwork, and enabled me to conduct the fieldwork more effectively.

Figure 2. Location of Ratlam district in Madhya Pradesh.

Source: http://www.ccih.org/grham/country/india/mp.gif.

Ratlam, located in the western part of Madhya Pradesh, is one of the educationally challenged districts of the state as well as of India. The literacy rate of women in Ratlam according to the 2001 census of India is just 48.20% as against the male literacy rate of 74.80%. The Gross Enrolment Ratio of girls is 98.6% at primary level and 87.7% at upper primary level. The percentage of out-of-school girls in the district is 52.45 against 47.54% of out-of-school boys. The dropout rate amongst girls in the district is 24.17% and the average attendance of girls in school is 64% against 75% of boys (Rajya Shiksha Kendra, 2007). Ratlam district is considered a special, focused district by the state due to its concentration of disadvantaged social groups such as the Schedule Tribes (ST) and its deficiency in key program indicators such as the number of out-of-school children, existing gaps in the school infrastructure (school buildings, black boards, toilets etc.) and a high gender gap in terms of enrolment and school attendance amongst girls and boys. Because of these distinctive features, I selected Ratlam district as the sample district.

There are six Community Development Blocks (administrative sub-units of a district) in Ratlam, of which I chose the Sailana block as the sub-universe of my study. Sailana ranks

second in the district in respect of its low female literacy rate (37.7%). It is also considered the most deprived block in the district from the point of view of education, as it has the lowest enrolment rate of girls (68.9%) in the age group 11 to 14 years, a high girls' dropout rate (26%) and a large number of out-of-school girls (2479) (Zila Shiksha Kendra, Ratlam, 2007). The block is situated 34 kilometres from the district head quarter, with a total population of 102,062, of which 51,525 are male and 50,535 are female. The percentage of STs to the total population of the block is 79.4%. Sailana is also inhabited by other disadvantaged social groups, namely the Schedule Caste (3.1%) and Other Backward Classes (2.6 %). The block is divided into 47 *Gram Panchayats* (administrative sub units of a block) covering a total number of 516 human settlements (revenue villages and habitations). The total number of households in the block is 20,658. The female literacy rate of the block, according to the 2001 census of India, is 37.7%. Out of 12914 girls in the age group 5 to 14 years old in the block, 2479 girls were not enrolled in any of the educational institutions according to the household survey conducted in June 2007 by the education department (Rajya Shiksha Kendra, 2007). The gender gap in enrolment in the block is 6% (only 63.6% girls are enrolled in school against 69.7% boys). Though the block is in an advantageous position from the point of view of its proximity to the district head quarter, it lags behind educationally, maybe because of its concentration of tribal populations. I chose Sailana as the sample block of my study, as it has the highest number of never enrolled (1255) and drop-out (1224) girls in the age group of 5-14 years in the entire district. The block also has the second lowest girls' enrolment (63.6%) in the district after the Bajna block (62.8%).

Though I partly selected the district and the block on the basis of my prior acquaintance with the area, I depended on official statistical data (secondary) to choose the villages within the block for my research. Prior to my field study in June 2008, I visited my home town in February 2008. This visit was due to family reasons. I took the opportunity of my trip to India to have a preliminary visit to my field of research, to gain access to the future participants of my research and to collect secondary data.

I selected three villages from the block on the basis of their particularly low enrolment of girls and high number of out-of-school girls based on the official data provided by the education department of the district. Closer scrutiny of the data however revealed certain discrepancies within them. For example, the list of out-of-school girls in the age group 5 to

8 years included several girls whose age was above 9 years. Similarly, when I tried to locate three villages for my study out of the three separate lists[26], I found no coherence among them. The first two lists were not reflected in the third list that gave the overall picture of the block for the age group 5 to 14 years[27]. I decided to follow the third list that consisted of out-of-school girls of the 5 to 14 year age group. Though I was aware of the discrepancies in the data, I had no option but to use that data. It was not possible for me to visit all the villages (there are 241 villages and 275 habitations in the block) prior to my fieldwork to study their village education register (VER)[28] and then select the villages. So I triangulated the information with the district level staff to select the villages. I was curious to examine whether villagers' exposure to urban towns and urban life influenced their socio-cultural practices, values and the gender roles in the villages that decide the inclusion or exclusion of girls in school education. For this reason, out of the three, I selected one village in my sample with proximity to an urban settlement. This was to understand whether there was any urban influence in promoting girls' education. The other two villages that I selected were due to their remoteness from the urban area and thus away from urban influences. This gave me the opportunity to consider the existing beliefs, customs and practices of people in remote and under-developed settings. Thus the selected three villages had a mixed geographical character and represented the diversity of the block as well the district.

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[26]Three separate lists were given to me by the district office of Ratlam district. The first list contained the names of out-of-school girls of the 5 to 8 year age group, the second contained girls of the 9 to 14 year age group and the third one gave the complete list of the 5 to 14 year age group. Different strategies are adopted for the enrolment of out-of-school girls of different age groups as their needs are totally different, hence the bifurcated lists.

[27]When I discussed this issue with the district team during my fieldwork visit, their response was that because of their overwork regarding official matters such as managing files, they did not have the time to look into the lists which were prepared by the data entry operator. They thought it might be a matter of typing errors. Due to time pressures they just passed on the data to the state office without checking them. Surprisingly nobody at any level had read through the data that were generated.

[28]The village education register is a document which primarily deals with the educational data of all the children of 3 to 14 years of the village/habitation.

The sample process at village level

Households

Though I planned to include 12 households in my sample initially, the final sample of my research consisted of 13 households in three villages. The key criterion for selecting households was that they had daughter/s who was/were out of school. The other criteria for participation were their economic[29] and social[30] status. In each household I interviewed the father and the mother. One of my respondents was a widow, thus I included another household in my sample by talking to the male head of that household and thereby increased the number of households. Five of my male (fathers) participants were in the age group of 31 to 35 years, four of them were in the age group of 36 to 40 years and the other three were above 40 years old. In contrast most of the mothers (11) were below 40 years. Six of the mothers were in the age group of 25 to 30 years and four were in the age group 31 to 35 years. It is worth mentioning here that most of my participants were unable to give an accurate account of their age. They suggested me to presume their age for them, though sometimes gave a vague answer, for example, 'umm, maybe 40 or 45 years'. In such situations I had to make my own estimation based on their appearance and the age of their first child. I might not have estimated their age accurately as villagers due to their harsh life style generally look older than they actually are. Most of my adult interviewees were illiterate. But there was a gender difference. Four of the male respondents were just literates and the other eight were illiterates whereas out of the 12 mothers, only one was literate. All my female participants except one were engaged in daily labour, one of them helping her husband in the family business of running a tea stall. Out of the 12 male participants, two had their own business (both of them owned tea stalls in the village), one was a truck driver and the rest were engaged in daily labour as their main source of living. Only five of my sample households possessed a small piece of land.

Table 3.1 shows the caste and economic status of my interviewees, and Table 3.2 indicates the number of girls in my sample and their educational status.

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[29] I included families from below the poverty line and families from above the poverty line.
5 Families from all the social categories such as Scheduled Caste, Schedule Tribe, Other Backward Classes and General category were included in my research.

Table 3.1: Caste and economic status of the households investigated.

	SC*		ST*		OBC*		General		Total
	APL*	BPL*	APL	BPL	APL	BPL	APL	BPL	
Village -1				2		3			5
Village - 2		1			1	1		1	4
Village - 3	1	1				2			4
Total	1	2	0	2	1	6	0	1	13

* APL[31] – Above poverty line, BPL – Below poverty line.

*SC – Schedule Caste, ST – Schedule Tribe, OBC – Other Backward Classes.

Table 3.2: Number of girls and out-of-school girls in the households investigated.

	Total number of girls in the family	Age (in years)	Total number of out-of-school girls in the family		Age (in years) of out-of-school girls
			NE*	DO*	
Village – 1					
Household - 1	2	14, 11	1	1	
Household - 2	1	14		1	
Household - 3	4	14,12,11,6	3		14, 12, 11
Household - 4	2	17, 12		2	
Household - 5	4	21,17,13,11	4		
Village – 2					
Household - 1	2	10, 8		2	
Household - 2	3	15, 11, 7	1	1	15, 11
Household - 3	4	20, 14, 10,7	3		20, 14, 10
Household - 4	3	13, 12, 9	3		

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[31] Families with no sustainable or permanent source of earning their livelihood are categorised as BPL families and the families with a sustainable source of earning are categorised as APL families. Families are declared as belonging to BPL and APL categories by the district government based on their economic condition, earnings per annum (Rs. 11,000/approximately £ 137) and holding of assets. According to Chelliah and Sudarshan (1999), 'the official concept of poverty in India is based on a calorie norm: families which cannot afford to spend enough on food to obtain a stipulated minimum calorie per capita per day are defined to be below the poverty line' (1999: xiii).

Village – 3					
Household - 1	3	16, 14, 10	2	1	
Household - 2	3	12, 10, 7		3	
Household - 3	1	11		1	
Household - 4	3	10, 7, 3		1	10
Total	**35**		**17**	**13**	

*NE: Never enrolled, DO: Drop out

Out of the total 35 girls (28 were of school-going age, one was under-age (three years old) and the rest six were over-aged (above 14 years) for the purpose of school) in the households in my sample, only four were in school at the time of the interview. The remaining 30 girls, a significant number had either dropped out or had never been to school. One girl was three years old and thus did not fit into any of the categories. As Table 3.2 indicates the majority of girls (17) amongst the out-of-school category were never enrolled and 13 who did enter school, dropped out of the system before completing elementary level education. Six out of the 13 girls (in the households where I interviewed) who had dropped out of school, had left school after class three; two had left school after class two; another two had dropped out in class one; one girl in class four; and two girls had dropped out after class five (one of them passed class five and the other failed in the examination).

Only one family in the sample households did not have any son, four had one son, seven had two sons, and one family had six sons. The age of the boys in the families ranged from four (youngest) to 27 (oldest) years. All the boys of school-going age (5 to 14 years) were in school.

Out-of-school girls
I interviewed six out-of-school girls taking two from each village. Four of the girls had dropped out of school after class one, two, three and five respectively whereas two had never been to school. The youngest girl participant of my cohort was ten years old and the oldest was 14 years, one of the girls was 12 years old and the remaining three were 13 years old.

Teachers

At the village level, my sample also included one teacher of the school in the village/hamlet. The three teachers included in the sample were all male - there were no female teachers in these villages. The inclusion of the teachers' perspectives added a new dimension to the findings of my research which I shall discuss in the following chapters.

Above the village level

Administrators from the school education department at the cluster, block and the district level were included in my study to examine their policy interventions and to discuss the impact of these interventions in maximising girls' participation in school education. The administrators included two cluster academic coordinators (CAC), one block resource centre coordinator (BRCC), the gender coordinator (GC) of the district and the district project coordinator (DPC) who is overall in charge of the programme at district level. All the administrators included in my sample were male except for the gender coordinator.

I did not encounter any problem in the process of selecting my sample block or the villages. But this was not the same with the selection of the households in the sample villages. I had planned to use the village education register (VER) of the village to select my sample households. The VER is a document that contains household data of the educational status of all the children of the village in the age group 3 to 14 years. One page of the register is devoted to each household of the village from which one can easily identify the households having children in or out of school. The register should also provide a picture of the out-of-school children in the village as a whole. In short, this register is supposed to be a mirror of the existing educational scenario of the village which is updated annually at the onset of the academic year in the state - at the end of June. The updating of the register is done by the teachers of the village/habitation and is supposedly verified by the cluster academic coordinator who keeps a copy of the register in his office, the cluster resource centre.

While still in the UK, I had planned to give equal representation to families belonging to different economic and social strata. Initially I had planned to include a total of 12 households from the sample villages that is, four households per village. To give equal representation to families belonging to different economic strata I thought of including six families (half of the total households) belonging to the BPL category and the other six

families belonging to the APL category. I had also planned to include families from all the social categories, e. g. from the Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe, Other Backward Classes and General Caste. My aim was to see through the lenses of the economic and social class structures of these areas and to understand whether the economic and social status of the family had any bearing on the decision-making process regarding girls' education. The criterion for the selection of households for my research was based on the number of out-of-school girls in the family. I had intended to select families in the villages by listing them according to the number of out-of-school girls in the age group 5 to 14 years in descending order and by including the families with highest number of out-of-school girls in the sample. Families with only one girl child and not attending school, and families where all the girls were not attending school, were planned to be given preference.

Likewise initially I had decided to include one never enrolled and one dropout girl in each village thus having three girls from each of the categories. However, I had to alter my plans in the field based on the field realities that is, due to the unavailability of respondents in some categories. Finding out-of-school girls to participate in my research was a daunting experience. Girls who were young in age (7 to 11 years) were often too shy to talk,[32] they only smiled at each of my questions and uttered nothing. I shall discuss the meaning of this in subsequent chapters. The availability of the older girls was always in question as they were mostly out at their work. Though I had planned to include only the girls of my sample households, in the process I ended up with three girls belonging to the sample households and three from families who did not. I also had only two girls of the never enrolled category and four from the drop out category in my sample. Overall the process of identifying my interviewees was made very difficult by the unreliability of the official data.

Doing qualitative research in a quantitative-research-dominated area
I adopted a qualitative research method which, though not unfamiliar, is certainly unpopular in the state of Madhya Pradesh where research is dominated by the quantitative paradigm. The assumption that the findings of research should be such that they can be replicated elsewhere has made quantitative research more popular, and there has been a lot of it. When I described my research project to the state, district and block level educational

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[32]In contrast to this, one of the out-of-school girls of my sample was ten years old and was very much articulate during our conversation.

functionaries, whose support I sought, their first reaction – based on my history as an employee of the education department at the state level - was: 'what is the need for conducting this research'? As an insider in the education department and the locality I was studying, people had the opinion that I was fully aware of the situation in the field. I had a tough time explaining the need for fieldwork for my research project. As an insider I could understand this, as much research has been undertaken by the education department in recent years (and I was involved in much of it), though in the name of qualitative research the department ended up doing mostly quantitative research.

There are practical justifications for adopting quantitative research methods. They seemingly provide a clear picture in a very short time period and offer a quick summary of a prevailing situation, thus saving time for functionaries and policy makers who are very busy with the nitty-gritty of official proceedings. So narratives and descriptive ways of gathering data are avoided and replaced by figures presented in tabular form and findings in bullet points. Against this backdrop, it was very natural for the district project officer to say to me, to show his generosity in helping me, 'don't worry madam, whatever data you want, will be made available to you. Just give me a list of the information that you need, within a week's time I will furnish you with the data'.

The adoption of interviews and focus group discussions as my method of data collection rather than questionnaires and checklists that are very popular and conventionally used for conducting research in Madhya Pradesh thus raised the eyebrows of the functionaries. This made me recall my experiences as a functionary in the school education department. While trying to induct some of the district level officials to conduct research, I described how to do classroom observation. Most of the participants came out with the opinion that it would be better to give them a checklist where they could put 'tick' or 'cross' marks while observing the classroom proceeding. They were reluctant to write narratives about their observations. This attitude of the functionaries was also evident throughout my PhD research at all levels.

The duration of my fieldwork which lasted for three months from June till the end of August 2008 was another major concern for the officials of the education department at the district level. During my preliminary visit to the district I discussed my fieldwork plans with the district team. I was told by the district project coordinator that to cover three

villages I would need only two days. He suggested that I could cover two villages in one day and so my work at the village level would be over within two days' time. For discussions (interviews) with the block and district level functionaries I needed another day. It was hard for them to believe that research that covered three villages would take three full months.

Following a qualitative research method and resorting to in-depth interviews made my task even tougher at the village level. First, participating in research is something alien to the people of this area; at the most, they talk to the visiting officials who come on a tour to their village. These discussions generally last about five to ten minutes and mainly comprise of the officials asking short questions to which villagers give answers, mostly in 'yes' or 'no' terms. Second, people were not accustomed to participating in research that encouraged more informal interactions, talking about their own experiences, customs and traditions, social and cultural practices and reflecting on their own actions and decisions. Third, the time devoted to the interview was unusual because people were not used to talking to outsiders for more than a brief period at most. I shall elaborate these issues in detail in the section devoted to interviewing below.

Using a research facilitator

Though I was familiar with the geographical area of my study, I had not visited the sample villages previously. I therefore needed of a person to introduce me to the community, the teachers of the concerned villages and also to help me in locating the households in the villages. The other purpose of opting for a facilitator was to deal with the language barrier that I had in the field which I discuss at a later stage in this chapter. Although I was aware of the fact that the involvement of a facilitator might discourage my respondents who might feel that 'these "others" would then have access to what they [had] divulged through the course of the research' (Cannon, 1989 and Afshar, 1994 in Letherby, 2003: 103), I had no other option. I was fortunate to be able to *choose* a person to accompany me to the villages in the initial days. Like Harrell, I too 'manipulated the relationships [with the officials of the education department] for the purpose of research' (1981 in Wulff, 2000: 157). I selected a person who was placed at the block level office of the education department as a 'school supervisor'. I was in need of a person who first, was local, second, knew the languages (*Malvi* and the tribal language *Bhili*) that the community members speak, third, was sincere, reliable and mature enough to understand the explorative nature

of my research and act accordingly. On the basis of my previous association with the functionaries of the school education department, I selected a man who I thought had got most of the qualities that I was looking for. Prior to our visit to the villages, I inducted my facilitator regarding the nature of my research, what I was looking for, how to approach people, how to talk to them and how to ask questions in as simple a way as possible. The involvement of the facilitator in my research helped me to a certain extent, specifically to talk to the families belonging to the Schedule Tribe categories despite the fact that his presence also influenced my research adversely in some ways and I discuss this in detail later in this chapter.

Hunting for households

The first village

As my fieldwork started at the beginning of June when the schools were closed for the summer vacation, I relied on the village education register through the cluster academic coordinator for selecting my sample households. In order to have access to the village education register, I visited the concerned cluster resource centre in the morning at around 11:00 am as the opening time of the office was 10:30 am. On my way to the centre, I met the head of the cluster resource centre at a tea stall, where he had stopped to have a cup of tea before starting his office work. My facilitator, the person who was accompanying me from the block office, recognised him and introduced me to him. At our request he (the cluster head) came with us to the office and arranged to locate the whereabouts of the cluster academic coordinator over the phone. The cluster academic coordinator (CAC) was on a field trip and arrived after an hour. This happened due to a certain emergency that the cluster academic coordinator had to attend to, though my visit was planned and he was informed about my visit long in advance.

To my surprise, I found no VER of the villages in the cluster resource centre. According to the cluster academic coordinator the register was kept at his home and not in the office, for which he gave a very valid reason. He said that as the officials of the block asked for information every now and then and mostly on an emergency basis, he had to rush to the block office to furnish the required data, so it was convenient for him to keep the register handy, in his house, so that he could perform his duties on time. On my request to make the register available to me, he promised that he would hand it over to me on my way back to the block head-quarter as his house was on the way. I utilised that day by talking with

the head of the cluster and visiting the village of my study to meet people and introduce myself. To my utter disbelief it emerged during my discussion with the cluster head that he did not have any idea about the VER. On my way back, I insisted on stopping at the house of the CAC to collect the VER and was again surprised to be informed by my facilitator that it would not be made available to me. He (my facilitator) revealed the fact that there was no such register at the CAC's. The latter had informed my facilitator not to take me to his house as the register was not with him. That was the first shock for me in the field. Though I was aware that some of the field level functionaries manipulate their data at some point or other, not finding the VER, the document which is crucial for all kinds of planning and reporting, was something hard for me to digest. This made me wonder how the functionaries at the higher levels such as the state are fooled (and I include myself in this category) by grassroots level workers. It highlighted the fact that data collection as such was not a priority at any level.

I was left with no option but to think of alternative ways of selecting my households. Therefore I studied the village data on out-of-school girls held at the district office. This data gave me a detailed account of the number and names of out-of-school girls in the villages along with their parents' name. The next day, I visited the first village with the data of the out-of-school girls in my hand and tried to locate the families. The data that I had collected from the district did not match the actual situation in the village. When I attempted to locate the families who were identified as not sending their girls to school, what I actually found was that most of the families did not even exist in that particular village. In two instances, the family I visited based on the secondary data did not fall into my category of respondents as the daughters of that family were in school. Out of the list of 16 families I could find only one in the village. To find the other families in the village whose girls were not in school, I talked to the first family that I visited and also to other villagers whom I met on the way. This informal networking and snowballing strategy to find my respondents proved to be more fruitful than following official data. By talking to the villagers, I got, though not a very clear, a somewhat clearer picture, of the families who were not sending their daughters to school. As the villagers were immensely busy with their own day-to-day subsistence activities, they did not keep an account of what was going on in others' houses. Also, as education was not regarded as that important, the villagers tended to neglect the school-going status of the children of others. This became

clear to me when I took a closer look at the life of the villagers at a later stage. In the end I selected five households from the first village to include in my study using the snowballing technique.

The second village

By the time I visited the second village for my sample in the month of July, the schools were open and the teachers were generally available in the schools for help if required. But the teacher was not available in the second village that I visited as he was busy with some other work assigned to him by the district administration (office of the chief executive officer). Later on, I came to know (as told by the teacher) that he had been engaged in correcting the voters' list[33] of the villagers. I followed the same strategy that had worked in the first village. I approached some people sitting at a tea stall at the side of the main road of the village. I spoke to them regarding what I was looking for and asked for their help. The owner of the tea stall happened to fit the category that I was looking for as his daughters, two of them, had stopped going to school the previous year. He agreed to share his experiences with me. The shop owner and the villagers present also helped me to locate other families of interest for my research.

The third village

I was pleased to find the VER in the third village that I visited. In this village the teacher allowed me to have a look at the VER and find the households. He also helped me in the process.

From each village I selected four households (except in the first village where I had five households) for my study. Though I had planned to include families belonging to APL and BPL categories in each village, I ended up taking all the families from the BPL category in the first village as there was no family belonging to the APL category there. The selection of households was thus done on the basis of my discussion with the villagers in the first two villages and after reviewing the VER in the third village.

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[33]The correction of the voters' list was in progress as the state government and the central government were gearing up for the forth-coming election in the state as well as in the centre. The teachers were engaged in this task. Though the teachers were instructed to perform this task in their respective school premises some of the teachers had their office in the *panchayat* building during this period resulting in the closure of the school.

After this process of selecting the households, I visited the selected families to have a preliminary discussion with them and to build rapport. This preliminary contact was not an easy task. Though I was aware of the fact that the villagers might not be available at all times when I was in the village and had prepared myself beforehand to face this situation, it was disheartening to find people away in most of the cases. In seven of the households both the parents and their daughter/s were out as they had gone to work. However, in two of the houses out of the seven, the elderly parents (grandparents) were present. In three households I could meet the girls (out-of-school) who were there that day. In two further houses I could meet the mother of the girls who had skipped going to work that day.

I had to visit three households a couple of times and another two households more than three times to have the first contact with the head of the family. Being an Indian and very familiar with the cultural setup I decided to talk to the head of the family (the father) first before interviewing any other family members. Indian society is highly patriarchal and the wife has a secondary position in relation to her husband. So in general, I thought it better to discuss my work with the father of the family first. However, two of the women insisted that there was no problem if I interviewed them before talking to their husbands and I abided by their view. In one instance, the woman was a widow. Thus there was no point in waiting for any consent from the head of the family. None of the families that I had chosen to interview refused to talk to me although there was the problem of their availability for me as they went to work early in the morning and came back in the evening.

Fortunately, the villagers were not going very far in search of work in that period as they were either working in their own field or getting plenty of work in and around the village as it was the season of the monsoon, and agricultural work was at its peak. This had its own advantages and disadvantages too. In terms of advantages, people were available in and around the village, as they did not have to commute to a far-off place to work. They came back by 4:30 pm or 5:00 pm. Second, if not in the house I was able to catch them in their field (the strategy that I learnt there in the process of working) and persuade them to talk to me. I utilized this situation to the maximum to contact my participants. However, in many instances I had to alter my interview plan due to the unavailability of my respondents. Though I visited them prior to my interview and fixed the day and time for the interview, I had to leave empty-handed several times as by the time I reached the village, they had gone to some other place on business ranging from going to the market to

collect seeds for sowing in the field, getting essential items/provisions for the house, going to attend a funeral in the adjacent village, changing his/her mind and going to work, or to going to see relatives in another village.

Though I found these experiences difficult, I know and value the time of the respondents who were in constant struggle for their survival. They literally lived for the day; they did not know what they would do tomorrow, whether they would get work and thereby the money to buy their bread. So, planning for the future and working in accordance with it was a rare phenomenon for them though I cannot say that it was always the case, as they did plan certain things such as the marriage of their children with great care (maybe because it involved a lot of money). Also, the memory of the villagers, I found, was short-lived, possibly because of their overwork and they often forgot that they had promised me time. Or they understandably felt that it was more important to attend to their work than giving me time to talk. I respected their need to attend to their day-to-day needs. After all, I thought, the interviews can wait but not the funeral of some near and dear one, or purchasing seeds for sowing or getting provisions from the weekly market which if missed, they had to wait for another full week to get provisions.

In contrast to these reasons, some respondents were also away from home when I visited for other reasons which were different for men and for women. The women were away to fetch water or wash clothes near the source of water (generally a dug well or a hand pump in the village), whereas men were away just to be at the nearest tea stall or talking to (I won't say gossip as this is considered a domain for women) other villagers at the central point of the village which is meant for the gathering of the male folk of the village. As a woman I had to wait for them to come by sending somebody, either a child of the family I visited or one of the children who followed me (which was a normal practice) up to the house from the main road of the village to inform and call them. To deal with the unplanned way of lifestyle of my respondents, I tried to fix the interview as soon as possible after initial contact, either on the next day or two days after. I also offered to have multiple interviews on the same day of my initial visit to the family as they were present at home that day and could not be sure about the days to come. So there were days when I conducted two interviews per day, sometimes one per day and some days I had to come back without any, as nobody was available. On five occasions I conducted two interviews in the same village, but in further three instances I had to rush from one village to the next to be sure that I was there on time and did not lose the opportunity. My apprehension about

losing a respondent/interview made me rush from one village to the other on the same day though it made me completely exhausted at the end of the day.

Travelling was one of the intimidating experiences that I faced during my fieldwork. The distance between the district headquarter and the block was only 34 kilometres. But after reaching the block from the district where I was staying, I had to travel a further 30 to 45 kilometres to reach the villages. Initially I had planned to stay close to the villages of my sample to avoid spending a lot of time on the road. When I expressed my desire to stay in the 'rest house' of the block, I was discouraged by the district level functionaries. According to them, these 'rest houses' which can accommodate only two persons, are mostly used by public representatives and thus it was not advisable for me to stay there. With my prior knowledge of the area and of the political representatives I realized that they were indicating the misuse of the rest houses by the political representatives to have informal gatherings of their followers at night which normally involves the consumption of alcohol. To stay in such a place was not thought appropriate either by my former associates from the district or by my family members, who were extremely anxious about my safety during my fieldwork. Thus I decided to stay in one of the decent hotels at the district head quarter and travel to the villages and come back at night.

This made me aware of how vulnerable women researchers are in the field during their fieldwork. I was also cautioned by the district team to avoid travelling on one particular road after dark which unfortunately I had to use to reach two of my villages. This warning was again due to safety reasons though of a different nature. In one particular patch of the road there lived a particular community called *Gujjar* who normally resort to looting things from by-passers. So I was also advised to wear as little gold as possible during my stay in the district.

Every day I had to travel 65 to 80 kilometres between the place of my stay and the interview. The road condition was very challenging. Though the road connecting the district and the block was just about manageable, it was daunting to travel between the block and the villages. At most of the points it was like sitting on horseback, with constant jerks. During dry days it was dusty and when it rained there was a fear that the wheels of the vehicle would get stuck in the mud, making it practically impossible to move. During the initial days of my fieldwork I was intimidated by the dust and by the end of July I

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mostly had to take the longer routes as the short cuts were fair weather roads only. I was also fully dependent on the vehicle that I had hired which turned up late some days with the excuse of a flat tyre or some engine work which needed to be repaired urgently. On two occasions the vehicle had a puncture on the way before reaching the village which threw out my schedule for the day. In another instance the vehicle had a flat tyre (for the second time in the day) while coming back from the village and we had not yet crossed the dangerous part of the road (the part which had the threat of robbers) so my driver got anxious about my safety. He managed to call another vehicle from his travel agency which reached the place after two hours with a spare wheel. We reached the district late at night and were fortunate enough not to have any other problems on the way.

While in the UK, my supervisor advised me to stay in the village to have a closer experience of the life of the villagers. She thought that I should spend at least a few nights in the village if not the entire period of my stay which I too thought a good idea. However, villages in India lack basic amenities such as electricity, safe drinking water and toilet facilities. Additionally, finding a place to stay overnight in a village is very difficult as the only public building in the village is the school and it has no electric connections. I did not even explore the possibility of staying with a family in the village after witnessing the severe poverty of the villagers. The culture of hospitality that prevails throughout India requires that a visitor is offered tea or food. This is irrespective of a family's economic status. They try to do their best for the visitor. This aspect had a bearing when I decided to stay in the district as I did not want to deplete the villagers of their meagre resources. But I was forced to stay in the village for one night as the river was overflowing and the bridge had submerged on my way back in the evening due to heavy rain. We had to go back to the village and ask for help. The *Sarpanch* (the political head at the grassroots level) of the village (who is generally well off amongst the villagers) was happy to offer a place to me to spend the night. The driver slept in the vehicle whereas I shared the room with *Sarpanch*'s wife and two daughters. I utilised this occasion to have an informal talk with these women which helped me to understand their life and to observe the gender stereotypes prevalent in rural Indian society. But it also reinforced my sense of the difficulties of trying to live in the villages.

Conducting interviews

Interviewing marginalised, socio-economically vulnerable and illiterate or semi-literate villagers had its own challenges. I interviewed 12 men (fathers), 12 women (mothers) and six adolescent girls and each category imposed different challenges on me in the process of interviewing. But there was one challenge which was common to each of the categories, i.e. explaining my work to my participants. This I found was the most difficult part of my interviewing process. I may say that, urban by birth and upbringing and of an educated background, I had not thought sufficiently about explaining my work to my participants at the village level. I never gave much thought to how I would explain that I was doing this research as part of my PhD to villagers who were either illiterate or just literate. While talking to them the fact became clear to me that regarding education, their knowledge was limited to the physical availability of the school building in the locality and did not move beyond that. For example, in the village where there was a primary school, people thought class five was the maximum one could study up to (and the women mostly fell into this category). If there was a middle school either in the village or near the village, then class eight was the maximum one could study up to, according to the villagers. The male participants, of course, due to their contact with the outside world, had more exposure to education but they too had no knowledge about education beyond higher secondary level. So I was caught in a dilemma as to how to explain my work. Would they understand what a PhD degree or research was? At the same time it was very important to explain my work because if I did not do so, then they would have thought that I had come from the department of education (as I was accompanied by one of the functionaries of the block level staff in the initial days of my visit to interpret the language and to introduce me to the community) to inspect the school in the village which would have influenced their responses in particular ways. I told the villagers, one, that I was not from the education department, two, that I was still studying and wanted to understand the problems parents face in general in sending their girls to school and to learn what could be done to encourage the participation of girls in school. As I put it in general terms, people were happy to respond since it did not seem to affect them individually. To my surprise, none of them asked any details about my study and research. This may be due to the prevailing culture of not asking questions of people belonging to a higher caste in respect of education, social structure and urbanised background.

The place of my interview was as crucial to my study as the interviewing itself. At the village level, I conducted 19 interviews in the house of the interviewee, two in the school building, six in open areas (outside the house, under a tree near the house or sometimes in the backyard of the house) and another three near the agriculture field where my participants were working. All the women participants were interviewed in their houses except one who was in her field helping her son to plough (she was a widow). It was the male participants who were mostly interviewed outside the house based on their availability. This clearly reflects the social and living arrangements of the community of my study area, in that women in the main were, except when engaged in specific outside tasks, confined to the indoors whilst men own the public space. I avoided interviewing girls in their home as I was afraid that their responses would get influenced by the presence of their parents and other elders and they would not be able to talk freely. The other reason why I chose to try to interview the girls away from their home was to be sure that there was no disturbance from the parents and other members who tended to call the girls often to attend to some task or other. However, I interviewed two girls in their house as there was no one in the house during that time. This arrangement was not devoid of disturbances as the girls mostly brought their younger sibling or child of their older sibling with them since taking care of these small kids was their responsibility.

Though the villagers did not question my intention or the purpose of my visit, they were curious and eager to know what was going on when I was interviewing. This was reflected in their coming and watching the process of interviewing. Whether it was in the house or outside, slowly, people of both sexes would join in (in the case of a house, the people who joined were other members of the household or the neighbours but in the case of the outside, it was passers-by). Slowly a small crowd would gather. Initially they would just be silent observers but gradually they would start answering or prompting the answer from the main interviewee. I respected their feelings and eagerness to participate in the process but requested them to leave us alone when it really interfered with my interviewee and I. I told them that I would talk to them separately at a later stage, giving them a chance to express their views. Conducting focus group discussions helped me to address that need of the villagers. However, the gathering of a crowd which happened frequently initially, became a more irregular feature towards the middle of my fieldwork, probably because the curiosity of the people had faded by then.

On average my interviews lasted 45 minutes to an hour and a half. There were interruptions in between, especially in the case of the women who had to attend to work that ranged from giving water to members of the family, food to children, chasing out goats and cows that intruded into the house, to attending to something kept on the stove. It was not possible to avoid these circumstances which reminded me that I was on their territory and had to follow and respect their requirements.

I never carried anything with me at the first meeting for the family as a return for giving me time. I was aware of the fact that exchanging gifts is related to status and prestige rather than generosity in the Indian context. In Indian society, it is the visitor who is treated and offered something. As soon as a visitor enters, the host would offer a glass of water which might be followed by a cup of tea if their condition permitted it. I was always offered a glass of water, and a cup of tea in two instances which I accepted in order to bridge the gap between us. In Indian society where the caste system still prevails, not accepting water from someone may imply that you are stigmatising the family or the person because of their caste. Hence I accepted water, whoever offered it to me and whenever it was offered (though I was carrying my own bottle of water). The consequences of this were twofold: I got accepted by the family I visited, and second, I got a severe cough and cold in due course. However, I carried some sweets (candies and chocolates) and biscuits for the children in the house on my second or third visit. This was more justifiable as I was no longer a stranger to them and giving something to children is a very common practice.

This act of mine was the result of a constant dilemma within me regarding how my interviewees were going to benefit from my research. What was I contributing in return for what I was receiving from them, the tangibles such as hospitality and their personal life experiences? These questions kept bothering me but as Griffin argues, 'in most interview situations both the interviewer and the interviewee stand to gain and want something that the interview provides: data, a listening ear, or an opportunity to exchange views on a specific topic' (Griffin, 2005: 184). Other than providing a listening ear to my participants, I found my 'role as educator' (Shah, 1979: 37) a return and provided information that they required. I was considered as a source of information related to various government schemes and the way they operate as I had come from the state capital and so, from the villagers' perspective, somewhat represented the state government. They would ask about how they could get maximum benefit out of government-sponsored programmes and I

supplied them with the information when I knew the answer. On two occasions, when I myself did not have the information, I politely told them that I would get it for them and let them know on my next visit. Their enquiries were mostly related to the scheme that guarantees wage-labour for the villagers, a scheme of public distribution, and the health schemes; never was I asked any questions regarding education and the school.

In violation of the principle of 'informed consent' such as signing a consent form commonly practiced in western countries, I never undertook any such formalities with my participants. This was so as not to put them in a panic as any written document involving their name is a threat to illiterate villagers. I preferred to adopt Liu's (2007) principle not to use consent forms in order to not upset my participants as I thought this would hamper my interviewing process. I went a step further and simply informed them that I was going to use what they had said to me to understand the problem in a more realistic way and their words would be kept anonymous.

Recording the interview was something the interviewees had never experienced. In order to make the process less threatening I used a very small digital recorder (MP3 player) to record the interviews. The smallness of the recorder proved to be very useful as the interviewees became less attentive towards it and in due course completely overlooked its presence. None of my interviewees said 'no' to my recording the interview though one of them (a girl of ten years old) was worried that her mother would come to know what she had told me regarding her views about her marriage. She asked me not to let her mother listen to her recorded voice. I had to assure her that no one other than me would listen to it and there was no need for her to worry. After this her facial expression changed to a more relaxed one.

Along with the digital recorder I also always carried a digital camera with me which helped me to establish a friendly and close relation with my participants. Women and specially girls were very pleased and sometimes demanding too to have their photographs taken. They would pose for me to take their photographs and would gather around me to see it immediately. The fact that they could see their photographs immediately through the digital camera, made them more excited about it. Most of them exclaimed, 'Oh! I never before saw my photograph' or 'look at that, that's me' or 'do I really look that fair?'

In addition to the digital camera, taking my son with me to the villages also gained me a welcoming gesture by my participants though I had my own apprehensions about it at the outset. Before being a researcher, I am a mother. As I had reached my home after a long gap from my stay in UK, the mother in me wanted to be with and spend as much time as possible with my children, especially the younger one who was four and a half years old. My children were also equally longing to be with me throughout my stay in India. I had to fight with my emotions and put the researcher image of me first to leave the children and go to my field which was 350 kilometres away from my home town and took five hours to reach by train. When I went to the field for the third time, my younger son accompanied me as he was on his holidays and was inconsolable this time. I was sceptical about his presence during my fieldwork till I saw the impact of it on the villagers. I was more easily accepted by the villagers when my son accompanied me. He went around with the other children who were very pleased to take him with them and show him the goats, calves, cows, the well and the field. The children of the village including those of the families I visited were very happy to satisfy his curiosity regarding each and every thing that he saw in the village. His presence made my task easier as I did not need to look for a topic for icebreaking. We would talk about my son and their children and the commonality between us as mothers or parents would make us feel comfortable with each other. However, it had its own disadvantages too. I was interrupted several times in the interview when my son would ask me questions when he did not understand some words that the children said. At the end of the three-day visit, my son developed a severe gastrointestinal ailment and I had to leave the field. During my following visits, I made it a point to bank upon my previous experience and started the conversation by talking about my son and the children of the family he had visited.

Such informal talk helped to make my interviewees feel at ease. I normally started with informal talk such as asking about their work schedule for that day, about their children, their health or any other thing that I felt was appropriate to start the conversation. Once the initial ice-breaking phase was over, I would come to the main topic of my research. Initial questions that I asked were general in nature about the village school and the children of the village. This would be followed by personal questions related to their particular lives.

While still in the UK, I was very confident that I would have no problem doing my fieldwork in Ratlam district. After all, I said to myself, I had toured this district many times

and was familiar with the physical, social and cultural milieu of the area. However, my knowledge of the language spoken in this area was one of the concerns I had. India is a multilingual country where every state has its own languages. Within the state there exist different regional languages and dialects. In the area of my research *Malvi* is the spoken language though Hindi is the official one. With outsiders people speak Hindi and among themselves they speak *Malvi*. The tribal population of the area have their own dialect known as *Bhili*. Hindi, the language that most of the population speak, is not my mother tongue though I have accrued some knowledge of it over the period of my stay in this state. My knowledge of Hindi helped me to interact with people at the district and block level. With the villagers I conversed in Hindi as this is the language they speak to connect themselves with the outside world. There was not much problem to talk to the villagers in Hindi as long as they stuck to it. Sometimes they used one or more words from their dialect, i.e. *Malvi*, in the course of our conversation which was difficult for me to comprehend. On several occasions I had to ask them about the meaning of a particular word. Initially I was a bit sceptical of doing this, fearing that this would break the flow. But surprisingly my ignorance of the dialect and my asking for clarification made my participants feel good, as this act of mine demonstrated that I was really interested to know what they were saying. Besides, it gave them a sense of superiority and they felt proud to explain the meaning to me in great detail. This was because, maybe for the first time, an educated, urbanised and so to speak 'knowing everything' person had asked them to explain things and meanings. This change of role (villagers otherwise are considered to be ignorant and either avoided or 'taught' by every person coming from the district and state offices) proved to be crucial to engage my participants in the interview process.

However, while interviewing the families (two of them) belonging to the ST category, I needed the help of my facilitator who knew their language. The consequence of engaging my facilitator as translator was not very encouraging. First, the time (which was a very crucial factor in my research) involved in the interview became longer. Second, from the participants' point of view it was boring as they had to wait for the translator to explain to me what they had said. I also noticed that his non-verbal indication that he was tired affected what the participant said. For example, around the middle of one interview (around 3 pm) when the translator started pressing his head saying that he had a severe headache as he had been in the village from the morning, the participant said, 'I think I have said what I know and there is nothing else left for me to add'. By saying this, she was

trying to do a favour to the translator who was in a hurry to finish the process. I had to be very tactful to handle the situation so as not to lose the valuable contribution the participant was making through her conversation. I felt helpless as I depended on the translator for interviewing my participants belonging to the ST categories. I also felt that the presence of the male translator affected the involvement of the women participants in the interview as they were not very open when talking about their husbands before a male outsider. This was the reason why I chose to do away with the translator to interview the non-tribal communities by asking for clarification of a few of the words which I did not understand, and that worked.

Another aspect of my interview process which I need to mention here is the level of articulateness and assertiveness of my participants which posed a challenge. The most common answer I got was, 'What do I know', 'I don't know', 'how can I say anything about it' or 'I am illiterate, what do I know'. The common response of women was, 'I am a woman, what do I know about this', though all of them did come out of this state of 'what do I know' in the process of the interviews and contributed by speaking about their experiences and what they felt. I really had to coax them, encourage them and support them to speak out by saying 'oh yes, you too know so many things', 'I am really interested to know what you think', 'you can take your time'. It was important for me to 'provide an atmosphere conducive to open and undistorted communication' between me and my respondents (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003: 12). In the majority of cases the process was that I asked something, they gave the answer (a very short answer), I asked another question and they gave the answer to that. It was a real test of my patience. The questions which involved a 'why', were always difficult for my participants to answer. For example, the instant answer to my question 'why do grown-up girls not go to school?' was, 'it is like that, they don't go'. I think certain issues are so much embedded in the villagers' lives and their day-to-day practice that they have become completely naturalized and cannot be imagined otherwise. I also felt strongly in other instances that my participants were not used to answering questions that involve 'why' and engage in an analysis of the issue, situation or condition. They were rather more comfortable with questions related to 'what' and the majority of my women participants fell into this category.

Interviewing women

Reinharz and Chase (2003) argue that feminist researchers since the 1970s have become more focused on women's experiences and have used interviewing as a preferred method for collecting data. Interviewing women values their voice, their testimony and their experiences. They are otherwise the 'most silenced' group (Spelman and Lugones in Reinharz and Chase, 2003: 75). I fully agree with Reinharz and Chase when they argue, 'in many societies girls are still raised to be pretty objects who should be seen but not heard or fecund reproducers whose intellect is devalued' (2003: 77). I perceived, due to this particular way of upbringing, my women participants devalue themselves and think that they did not know anything because they are women. In three instances I had to abandon the interview with women (though I did not terminate the interview at the half way) as all my efforts to encourage them to speak proved to be ineffective. It was not that they did not want to speak, but I think, as they were not used to articulating themselves, they were unable to express themselves and I attribute this to their upbringing. One of my participants went to the extent of almost refusing to talk to me as she thought she had no knowledge of anything and could not be worthy of interviewing: 'I do not know anything, you were talking to their father (her husband) the other day, so what else I will say. He must have said everything'. In fact, it is worth mentioning here that with a little encouragement when she did speak, I was surprised by her knowledge and openness. Though all of them were not equally outspoken, the majority were open and came out with things which they had never revealed to anyone. Finch (1984: 78) has suggested that if a woman interviews other women 'being "placed" as a woman has the additional dimension of a shared structural position and personal identification'. I found in my research that being a woman, a mother and more or less in the same age group, helped to develop a 'sisterly bond' between the women I interviewed and myself and facilitated the interviewing. At the same time, as I was not directly and regularly involved in their lives, it helped them to express themselves more freely.

Interviewing men

I agree with Schwalbe and Wolkomir when they suggest that 'how men answer questions and how they behave in an interview are potentially valuable sources of data when the researcher has to do with gender or topics related to gender' (2003: 56). The men I interviewed added other dimensions to my data. Most of the male participants were defensive in their approach at the beginning. Some continued this even to the end of the

interview. There were probably two reasons why they felt defensive, one, to do with my gender and the other, because of my topic of discussion i.e. why *their* daughters were not in school. One of the participants started his discussion by saying that 'I am not like these villagers, all my children are in school' (though the only daughter he had, had dropped out of school after only one year of schooling). Some men were not very forthcoming with information. As long as we discussed the issue in a general manner they were comfortable but they always held back when we came to discussing their own daughter/s. They were defensive because, implicit in my questioning, which they understood, was a critique of the fact that their daughters were not in school. In this context they wanted to save face, and this was more important to them than providing accurate information. I took care to follow the strategies of Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2003) in allowing the participants to choose the place for the interview, not to ask about their feelings but thoughts at first and thus to enable them to feel more in control of the process. In my own understanding, I found older (those who were in their forties) male participants seemed comfortable while talking to me, whereas for the younger participants (in the age group of 31 to 35 years) it was just the opposite. This was perhaps because of the expectation of Indian society regarding how one should behave with the opposite sex. I recall here the typical behaviour of one of my participants (31 years old) who did not feel able to sit beside me on the same cot that I was offered for the interview. He got up often during the interview and stood a little away from me, causing me difficulty in recording what he said. He never made any eye contact with me while talking which indicated his uncomfortable feelings. I had to arrange for a stool and ask him to sit in front of me. I also called his eight-year old daughter to sit with us, after which he felt obviously more relaxed.

Interviewing adolescent girls

Interviewing girls in the age group of 10 to 14 years was one of the most affecting experiences that I had during my fieldwork. My apprehension before going to the field regarding interviewing girls proved to be wrong when I actually talked to them. As I interviewed girls at the end, i.e. after their parents, I was a bit familiar to them by the time of the interviews which made the girls feel at ease. I interviewed four girls who had dropped out of school and two girls who had never gone to school. This interview allowed them to 'give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on our adult interpretations of their lives' (Eder and Fingerson, 2003: 33). In contrast to my adult participants at the village level the girls were very comfortable throughout the interviewing

process except at the beginning when they acted a little shy. In comparison to their parents, especially their mothers, they were more reflective and relaxed, and enjoyed the process of interviewing as much as I did. It was the first time (as expressed by almost all of them) that somebody (an adult) was interested in and talked to them regarding 'things important to their lives' (Eder and Fingerson, 2003: 38), things they liked and their dreams. Some of them said at the end of the interview that nobody had ever asked them about what they liked or what they wanted to do. As the interview gave them a chance to think about themselves, their own life, their dreams and aspirations they felt happy about this.

I must confess here that finding out about the lives of these adolescent girls and how they were treated by the elders of their own family made me emotional. The narrations of their lives upset me at certain points when I could see that the girls were exploited (in terms of their physical labour contribution to the family) to the fullest by the family members. One of the girls while describing the work load they had in the house and how her brothers were exempted from doing any of it said, 'they do not do any work at home. They do not even drink water if we are not filling up the glass and giving them, whether they will wash their own cloths? we have to do that for them. If we don't do, then we get beaten'. Another girl, while talking about why she went for daily labour said, 'They (parents) say, unless you work what shall we eat? So we do the housework and go for labour'. I became conscious of my emotional involvement, when I listened to the interviews at the end of the day (which was a general practice I adopted in the field). As a woman myself I could feel their plight, and what bothered me most was the fact that they had to undergo discrimination because of their sex. This emotional involvement as a human being with my adolescent participants was one of the significant dimensions of my fieldwork experience which I think will remain with me forever. As pointed out by Ely, Anzul, Friedman *et al*. 'if we undertake to study human lives, we have to be ready to face human feelings' (1991: 49). At the same time despite this emotional involvement I tried to keep a balance between my emotions and the objectives of my work taking the cue from Sampson, Bloor and Fincham that these are 'all part of the job' and one has to 'consider practical ways of ameliorating these' (2008: 923).

Interviewing teachers

Teachers were the immediate link between the school and the community. Thus, talking to the teachers helped me to assess the linkages between the school and the community and

how they influence and affect each other. One of the teachers was very open to me and discussed matters regarding the initiatives taken by him, the problems he was facing from the community side as well as from the education department in performing his duties. My previous position as an officer at state level did not seem to impede our talking. At a later stage I came to know that the teacher was feeling free and more open with me than the other teachers owing to his past experience with me. During one of the teachers' training sessions in the past, I had encouraged this particular teacher while supervising the programme and this act of mine had a positive impact on him which had continued. The other two teachers were more cautious in terms of the perceived power differential between us.

Other than my status, my gender too impacted upon our discussion which was more prominent at the initial stage of the interview. They would say, 'Yes madam, everything is alright, going on as per the instructions of the higher office, we are trying to do what we can'. They were also more interested to show me the documents/registers of the school than talking to me. I think, their apprehension at the beginning of the interview made them act in that particular way as they wanted to avoid talking to me. But once they noticed my informal manner and the non-threatening atmosphere that I created by letting them know that this research had nothing to do with the education department and I was not going to disclose any information to the officials of the department, they felt relaxed and participated in the interview more actively.

Interviewing functionaries
My interviews with the administrators of the education department posed challenges of a different nature. The cluster level functionaries tried to give the best possible picture of their field area as they continued to think of me in terms of my previous role in relation to them (I had worked in the same department at the state level and was the officer-in-charge of this district). Although I knew some of their assertions were factually incorrect, for example, their claim and the data they showed me regarding the increased participation of girls in education in recent years, I decided not to contradict them. I thought my contradiction would lead them to be more defensive and that I would lose valuable responses. At the same time talking to the officers of the block and district level brought out some vital information pertaining to girls' education in the area. Sharing their

experience of working with communities, teachers and cluster level functionaries was useful for understanding this information.

On reflection I think, on the whole the administrators and the teachers not only noticed but enjoyed the changed role of mine during the interviews. This time, I was neither reviewing their work, nor assessing the physical and financial progress of the month, nor finding loopholes and weaknesses in the process of implementation and was not instructing them what was to be done over the following months. Rather, this time, they found somebody who was ready to minimise the power imbalance between us, eager to listen to them without passing any judgement and was more interested to understand and learn than to teach and pass on information. This changed role and attitude of me was crucial to elicit more accurate data from my participants.

I adopted the practice of not taking long notes or no notes at all while talking to my participants, especially at the village level and recording the interview was a great boon in this regard. This helped me to maintain eye contact with my participants, showing them that I was really interested in what they said, positioned me as an active listener and at the same time lessened their being concerned, as people in this area tend to be, about something being taken down in writing. Instead, I maintained field notes, writing down the important things after each and every interview. I noted down the expressions of my participants such as the way they perceived the interview, how I felt the interview proceeded, whether they were comfortable during the process, their laughs and smiles, if they were defensive while talking, specific issues that emerged and so on. I did this as soon as I said good-bye to the participant, sitting under a tree, or in the house of another respondent before starting another interview, or after coming back to my room.

I also did not fill in the demographic data form in front of them. As I mentioned earlier, this (taking anything in writing) could have made my participants concerned about the data they had revealed to me and thus affect the data. Instead, I asked about the demographic data at the end of the interview (as a part of the interview itself) and recorded them. At the end of the day I filled in the demographic data form myself by listening to the recorded interview.

Focus group discussions

I organised three focus group discussions, one in each village, which included the elderly persons of the respective villages. In rural communities in particular, customary practices, culture, tradition, rituals and belief systems are passed from one generation to the next through the elders of the family and the community. Their perceptions of life and everyday matters shape the practices observed and belief systems in a given community. Thus contacting the elderly people of the sample villages, I thought, would provide valuable input into understanding the tradition and customs of the concerned community and would be helpful for understanding their impact upon the family members and the community in regard to the education of girls. These discussions were planned to extend my understanding of the problems and aspirations shared by the community members. I discussed the status of girls' education, the reasons for girls remaining out of school in the villages, customary practices, traditions, beliefs and cultural factors prevalent in the area that did not permit girls to enter or remain in school.

I was inspired by Liu (2007) to use the vignette method for my focus group discussion. Liu used vignettes to study the life of women in China and I thought trying this method would be fruitful to encourage participants to talk more freely. I used a vignette, a short story about hypothetical characters and invited the participants to react. I built up a story about a village (and told my participants that this was a story about a nearby village that I had visited) with a school which was struggling to enrol all the children of the village, with some girls of school-going age for various reasons not attending school. After narrating the story I told them that I wanted to understand the situation in their village and to know the problems they were facing while thinking of sending their girls to school. The use of vignettes worked as an 'ice breaker' and to 'facilitate a discussion around participants' opinions' and to 'elicit cultural norms derived from participants' attitudes and beliefs' about this 'specific situation' (Barter and Renold, 1999: n. p.). My participants came out with reasons for girls not going to school in their village and mentioned the challenges faced when sending girls to school. As they talked in general terms and nothing was personalised or individualised, it was easier for them to talk more freely.

My focus group discussions comprised villagers from different age groups which provided a platform to represent both the young (29 years) and the elderly (56 years). Further, I included members from all the social categories e. g. the SC, ST, OBC and General in my

focus groups to obtain views of members of all the categories. Though the focus groups were heterogeneous by age and caste, they were homogeneous by gender. In the first two villages the focus groups consisted of all male members, whereas in the third village it comprised of only women. I made this selection first, to maintain the gender homogeneity of the group to minimise feelings of discomfort in disclosing emotional and sensitive issues by the members. Second, I wanted to avoid the gender hierarchy in Indian rural settings where female members habitually maintain silence before male members.

In contrast to Maclean's (1999 in Barter and Renold, 1999: n. p.) experience, my use of vignettes did not encourage much the 'quietest group member to voice an opinion'. The discussion was dominated by a few of the members although others nodded their heads in agreement. It was the members from the General category who were more vocal than the rest due to their (General category) higher social status in the community in the Indian context. On the other hand, in the women's group the older women were more dominant in the discussion than the younger ones due to their status, as daughter-in-laws remain generally silent before the elderly women of the community. I had to make an extra effort to involve some quiet group members by asking questions particularly to draw them out. Though the use of a vignette proved beneficial and it was helpful to talk about sensitive issues such as child marriage since it provided an impersonalised environment for the participants to respond more freely, my overall experience of the focus group discussion was not very encouraging. There was total chaos at some of the points when most members talked at the same time, though we had set the rule to talk by turn at the onset, making it difficult for me to understand what they were saying. However, the inclusion of the focus groups in my research was useful in painting a picture of what was socially acceptable in the community.

Classroom observation

I had not scheduled classroom observation as part of my research as I intended to look at the problem from the family and community perspectives. But the field situation gave me the opportunity to observe the schools and some of the classrooms. Whenever I found my respondents away from the village, even though the interviews were planned in advance, and I had nothing to do after travelling many kilometres to reach the village, I utilised that time and day to observe the school and the proceedings that were going on in the school and classrooms. These observations were extremely helpful to understand the school and

classroom dynamics which influence the participation of girls in school. I made it a point to sit in one corner of the class silently, taking care not to disturb and disrupt normal activities. During the lunch break I observed the behaviours of both boys and girls and had a chance to talk to them more informally. I noted down the key observations in my field diary. I looked at their school bags, notebooks and books to get a flavour of their academic level. Whenever needed I asked them to read a particular text from their book or from their notebook, asked a few questions related to their course and also asked them to solve sums and observed their answers carefully. I built upon the experience of my first classroom observation and refined things accordingly and prepared myself for the later ones. This exercise, though I did it accidentally, was really fruitful for gaining an insight into the workings of the schools.

The issue of being an insider/outsider

The issue of my insider/outsider identity as a researcher permeated my research. Swinging back and forth as an insider and outsider (Naples, 1996), my journey through my research was full of ambiguities and dilemmas. Letherby (2003: 133) too emphasises this when she points out that 'the researchers may see themselves as moving from an "insider" to an "outsider" position over time'. As Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002: 105) indicate, different feminist views have resulted in different feminist methodological approaches. There is growing acceptance in the field that 'feminist researchers must self-consciously reflect upon their status within the field' and how they are situated within social and power relations (Zavella, 1993). Thus in this section I articulate the situation of my identity as an Indian women, i.e. of similar ethnic background to my informants and its impact on my fieldwork.

Ethnic insiders, on the one hand, are regarded as able to access communities similar to their own background and as more sensitive towards framing questions that can help avoid misunderstandings. Thus, being an insider may not only let researchers understand the context of what is said in interviews better but may also make it easier for researchers to use their personal interpretations as sources of 'sociological insight' (Zavella, 1993) to understand and analyze the contexts. On the other hand, the insider status can also lead a researcher to a delicate situation as members of the same community often presuppose that an insider researcher knows everything already. Thus, researchers have to be aware of their bias towards the research project and community being studied.

As pointed out by Letherby (2003) the status of the researcher as 'insider' and 'outsider' is subject to constant negotiations throughout the research process. In my own case my 'outsider' identity was in fact more prominent than my 'insider' one. In ethnic terms I considered myself an insider as I am from the same ethnic group, speak the popular language, i.e. Hindi and am familiar with the area where I conducted my research. I had worked in this area for nine years and understood the socio-cultural milieu of the community. I was also an insider because I had a '[strong] understanding of the dynamics and play of social relationships that inform the situation under investigation' (Brayton, 1997: 5). Moreover, I was an insider in being a women and a mother myself. At the same time I was an outsider as there were many differences separating me from the community that I studied. First, I was not a native of this place. As a non-native and speaking a different mother tongue I was considered the 'other'. Second, I reside in the state capital which is highly urbanised and has the flavour of a metropolitan city. This is in total contrast to the remote rural area where I conducted my fieldwork. Third, I am educated and thus regarded as highly aware and belonging to the elite group. Fourth, and most importantly, I had been an officer in the education department at state level which gave me a higher social status, maintaining a certain power imbalance between my interviewees and I. Furthermore, my insider/outsider status was not static during the research process. Rather, it varied from one category of my participants to the other. I was an insider/outsider differently to my different interviewees and I discuss this in detail below.

While interviewing the mothers, I was considered an insider to some extent as I am a woman and a mother myself, but this boundary of including me as an insider would shrink due to the fact that I came from the state capital, as well as because of my accent, my appearance, the way I dressed, not to mention that I travelled in a vehicle (car) to reach them. Though I tried to dress as plainly as possible, included a few words from their language in my talk and tried to leave the vehicle at the entrance of the village and walk inside, (the news of my coming by car always reached them before me) this did not help much to include me in the insider category. And although the women were generous with their time and insight, it was also clear that there were important differences between us as they were extremely conscious of my privileges as an educated woman. This manifested itself when, during the process of the interview, most of them often said, 'what do I know? I am an illiterate woman' or 'you must be knowing, I am illiterate, how do I know about all this?' The 'traditional' notions of my female (girls and women) participants about family,

though most of them were earning members of the family, did not challenge the traditional role of the male members in the family. They considered their fathers/spouses to be the head of the family, the decision-maker, and the breadwinner, accepted their own subordinate position and that they should do all the domestic chores. My feminist questions made my outsider status appear glaring as it pointed out the contradiction of my position to their construction of themselves.

For my male participants, specially the fathers of the out-of-school girls, I was a complete outsider. The fact that I am an Indian had no impact on them as within India there are many ways for a person to be considered an 'insider' or 'outsider'. Though my ethnicity and my prior knowledge of the area made me seem an insider on one level, I was perceived as an outsider by my participants. Most of them made me realise this during our discussion by saying, 'You don't know madam, here [in the community] the trend is like that', or 'It is like that in our village, in our community, coming from Bhopal [the state capital] it may be new for you as things have changed in the cities'.

I think, in some ways counter-intuitively, I was in a rather doubly advantageous position by being considered an outsider by my participants and my own perception as an insider. As an insider I was aware of the cultural and traditional values of the communities, I was conscious of not asking questions that might be considered taboo, for example, about the sexual vulnerability of girls. Rather, my interviewees would just hint at this in a more covert way. For example, when they said 'we do not send grown-up girls to school because of the fear that something wrong will happen with them' or 'if we keep girls longer in the house and not send them to their in-laws they may indulge in something wrong and this will bring a bad reputation to the family', I understood that they were indicating girls getting sexually active before marriage, and so did not probe the matter further which would have put my interviewees in an embarrassed situation. As I was familiar with the local culture I always put on a scarf to cover my head when entering a village as this is considered a sign of respect to the elders. Besides, I addressed the elders as *dadaji* (grandfather) or *bhaisab* (elder brother) in case of males, and *naniji* (grandmother) or *mausiji* (aunt) in the case of a woman and greeted them with folded hands saying *namaskar* (hello). These gestures of mine made it easy for me to have access to my participants as I acted in accordance with their local customs. At the same time as an outsider I had more liberty to ask for explanations and details of certain terms and issues as

my participants considered me ignorant in matters of their cultural mores and were happy to satisfy my query and help me to get further information if required.

For the teachers and the administrators I was half way between insider and outsider. I was an insider as I had worked in the same department and was aware (according to them more aware than they themselves were) of the policies, strategies, implementation process of programmes, constraints and loopholes in implementation. At the same time my (past) state level functionary status made me an outsider to them. While talking about village level problems they would say 'you know these villagers', 'you know how difficult it is to convince the villagers' or 'you know the trend here'. But while describing their own problems they talked about them in great detail, keeping in mind that I could be a bridge between them and the state office in solving their problems as I was doing when I was their officer-in-charge two years previously.

Ethical concerns

As mentioned earlier, differently from the code of conduct and ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association (2002), the issue of informed consent as commonly practiced in the western sociological research was managed in my research in an altered way (Robinson-Pant, 2005). I did not use the informed consent letter, as use of such a letter could have put my interviewees in a panic since people (the illiterate and marginalised) are frightened if their names are taken in written form[34] by an outsider. In the initial days of my visit to the families, I explained my research in a simple way to my participants and informed them that the interviews would be recorded and no one other than me would have access to the recordings. I also promised to observe confidentiality in order to help protect their privacy in my research. The administrators who were educated gave me oral permission to use their interviews in the manner suitable to me. This was because of their trust in me based on our previous acquaintance and also due to the fact that signing a consent form is not a usual practice in the Indian context (Robinson-Pant, 2005). The initial explanation of my work, my intentions and how I was going to handle the data was useful to establish a certain trust between me and my participants and allowed them to talk more openly (Griffin, 2005). As pointed out by Trochim (2006), I followed the principle of

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[34]Villagers are frightened to give their signature or thumb print (in case of illiterates) as they consider that the person taking their signature/thumb print can take away their property including landed property by misusing it.

anonymity which calls for maintaining the anonymity of participants throughout the research. To do so, I used pseudonyms for my participants in my research.

Following feminist researchers like Kelly *et al*. (1994), I told my participants that if they felt uncomfortable with any question they were free not to answer. But in my research no such incident occurred. Overall, the participants were comfortable enough during the process of interviewing to talk freely. However, some of the male participants who were cautious to save their face, remained so after all my explanations.

My participants did not know what their rights were in a research situation regarding the use of data and negotiating transcripts and thus could not exercise their rights in obvious ways. This left me with the dilemma about my role to protect their rights and to take up the responsibility determining what would be harmful to participants. Another ethical concern that I had in my research was that the illiteracy of my participants did not allow any scope for 'participants' right to read and collaborate on the original transcript' (Robinson-Pant, 2005: 111). While in western countries the practice of negotiation for clearance of transcripts is not unusual, my interviewees agreed to allow me to use the collected data in the way suitable for me. This was facilitated because of their trust in me as a researcher and in most cases by their inability to read textual matters. This left me in a situation where I have to monitor myself the ethical implications of my research. It is difficult to talk of informed consent when informants have a limited sense of what they are 'consenting' to. The principle of not harming them must prevail here, even if it is mainly one of the researcher's judgement of what that harm might potentially entail rather than the participant's one.

Some of the features that crept in whilst interviewing the girls were disturbing and posed moral dilemmas as they challenged my stance as a researcher and my moral positioning as a member of society (Sampson, Bloor and Fincham, 2008). For example the girls mentioned getting beaten up by family members. What, as a researcher, should I do when I learnt about the human rights of my participants being violated? Should I report this to the concerned authority as part of an important ethical duty or should I just ignore it? As a result of my exposure to western academia I was more ardent to report matters to the appropriate authority (Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher, 2009; Beresford, 1997). But as an insider researcher I was aware that children in Indian society generally get beaten by their

parents and other elders of the family in the name of discipline. Moreover, what goes on within the family (unless vehemently opposed by members themselves), in the Indian context, is private and outsiders have less or no control over it. Having been aware of this, it would not have surprised me if the authorities such as police had turned a deaf ear, had I reported the matter to them. Children getting beating, mostly in the name of disciplining them, is a trivial issue which police - otherwise over-burdened with cases of greater magnitude - would have overlooked. Besides, incidence of beating girls never happened in front of me, thus I decided not to carry the matter further though. Nonetheless, I remained acutely aware of these issues, and experienced them as a cross-cultural dilemma.

Transcribing and analysing the data

In this section I reflect on the issue of transcribing my interviews and thus maintaining transparency of the process. I transcribed all my interviews from beginning to end. I intended to do this immediately once I had finished the interviews. However my field situation did pose a challenge to my intentions. After travelling a long distance and particularly bad roads, at the end of the day I was too worn out to start my transcription work. In most of the instances when I managed to gather courage in the night to transcribe my interviews the erratic supply of electricity in the hotel that I stayed in did not allow me to do so. As I had visited the district after a gap of two years, the functionaries of the education department would gather in the hotel room in the evenings to see me and I was not in a position to send them away. These were informal meetings with the functionaries of the district and block levels. These meetings provided me with the opportunity to discuss my research topic with them in a non-threatening environment but at the same time I had to give them time in guiding and assisting them in the completion of some of their official reports. This was one of the expectations (due to my former role as a guide and the first person for them to seek help from at the state level) of the district level functionaries which I could not turn down. I said to myself, I will do the transcription during some of the weekends, when I visit my home as there will be no problem with electricity or meeting officials. But to my surprise the state capital was also not untouched by power cuts then. Besides the problem of power cuts during my stay at home I also had to attend to my family and children who were waiting impatiently for my return from the field. With all these challenges I could finish only a few of my transcripts while in the field. Sharing those transcripts with my supervisor by email helped me to improve the rest of my interviews.

Though the process of transcription was tiring, I enjoyed doing it as re-visiting my interviews made me understand the issues important in analysing my data. At the same time, listening to the revelation of adolescent girls was an 'emotional experience' as their stories with some painful memories unfolded before me once again (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen *et al*., 2007). Translation while transcribing was a crucial issue for me which was not only time-consuming but also intellectually challenging as my study comprises several languages namely, Hindi, *Malvi*, *Bhili* and English. Collecting data in a language that is not my mother tongue and presenting it in another i.e. English is not an easy task (Birbili, 2000) and there were moments when I had a sense of loss. Birbili (2000: n. p.) argues that while translating interviews 'even an apparently familiar term or expression for which there is direct lexical equivalence might carry "emotional connotations" in one language that will not necessarily occur in another'. In line with Birbili's description, I came across several instances where the connotations that a term had in an Indian context was not the same in another culture. An example is the colour red which means prosperity and luck in the Indian context while it is regarded as signifying danger in the British context. Further the expression, 'involved in *Gobar Pani*' (cow dung and water) which has no meaning in English, implies the extremely busy life style of rural Indian women. Finding the exact meaning of some of the Indian colloquial phrases in English was one of the uphill tasks that I faced. In some instances when I was completely lost, I consulted one of my former colleagues via email for help in converting the particular word from Hindi to English. Instead of a word by word translation I went for the meaning of the content, focusing on translating the general meaning of the text. I tried to put the nearest meaning of the words, though it was sometimes hard to do justice to some of the cultural contexts. To ease my task I added footnotes to explain the issue briefly and by doing so I tried to make the cultural contexts as explicit as possible.

To get myself more familiar with my data, I started to read and reread my transcripts. This helped me to identify the themes and issues to be focused on while analysing my data. I followed the practice of grounded theory as this method requires that 'researchers take control of their data collection and analysis, and in turn these methods give researchers more analytic control over their material' (Charmaz, 2003: 312) in unfolding the story. Immersion in my data in the form of repeated reading helped me to identify key issues that emerged from my interview material. I then organised these themes into different chapters by 'different theories, using them when appropriate, ditching them when not, reworking

them to construct explanatory frameworks' (Skeggs, 1994: 82). By so doing, I linked my data and existing theories into an analytical discourse, as the subsequent chapters will show.

In this chapter I have discussed the methodological choices I made to structure my research design and which influenced my decisions regarding my research methods. I also discussed the difficulties faced during my fieldwork and the strategies and actions I chose to deal with those. By highlighting these issues I have tried to provide a reflexive account of my research process. I shall now turn to give room to my research participants' views by presenting my analysis of the data generated through my interviews in the following chapters. In the next chapter I discuss the meaning of education as perceived by my interviewees and its implications on the decisions they took regarding the education of their daughters.

Chapter 4
The Meaning of Education

In this chapter I shall discuss the meaning of education as perceived by my research participants, specifically the out-of-school girls and their parents, and its impact on girls' education. I shall analyse how my research participants articulated what children are taught in school, and the social and functional meaning of formal education in various spheres of family and community life. I then investigate the contributions of governmental incentives and school facilities in terms of the support they provide to encourage girls to join mainstream education. Finally I go on to explore the roles of teachers in promoting girls' education from the perspectives of the out-of-school girls and their parents.

Primary education as a material and socio-cultural entity

In this particular section I discuss the physical existence of a school in my sample villages and the education available in rural communities, the status of the enrolment of students in general, the infrastructure facilities of schools and how schools are perceived by the community.

The establishment of schools in the sample villages

Primary level schools were in operation in all three villages under study. While in village-3 the primary level school had been established since 1995, in the other two villages, i.e. in village-1 and village-2, initially Education Guarantee Schools (EGS), the alternative schools,[35] were opened in 1998 and 1997 respectively. These EGS schools were then upgraded to primary schools in 2005, giving them the status of a formal school. These EGS schools are presently referred to as 'up-graded EGS' (UEGS) by the government. However, they are still commonly called by their original names, EGS, by the villagers as well as by the officials of the school education department. The schools in all three villages were co-educational and provided education up to class five. The establishment of co-educational schools is a common practice not only in the state but also in the entire

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[35]EGS schools were opened in small habitations that did not qualify for a formal primary school (opening of a formal primary school requires a minimum of 300 households in the habitation). Initially these EGS schools were provided with textbooks of an alternative schooling programme which were replaced by Integrated Learning Material (ILM) in the year 2002 and these are common to EGS and the formal primary schools.

country, especially after the introduction of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in the year 1994. Though previously single-sex schools were opened in the state at primary and upper primary level, all the schools, both at primary and elementary level that were established after 1996[36] are co-educational. All the parents I interviewed were pleased about having a school in their village. They knew where the school was, physically. One of the fathers for instance said: 'Yes, the school is there … up there' (Balu) and a mother in another village said, 'The EGS in our village is here only, there, on top of that hillock' (Bhuri).

In village-1 along with the EGS there was a middle school (MS) which was situated one and a half kilometres away from the village. The MS was in the main village; my sample village was a nearby hamlet[37]. One of the fathers in village-1 acknowledged the existence of the MS in the main village when he said: 'Uh … there is a bigger school in the main village too, it is much older than the school in our *tapra* (hamlet), the EGS in our village started a few years back' (Bhima).

The parents in my sample expressed their overall contentment with having a school in their own village, and welcomed it. As one of the fathers in village-3 said, 'The school was opened in our village, you know, it was very good. It is good to have a school in the village itself. Our children are studying in our village school now which is nice' (Kalu). In village-1, where the EGS opened in 1998, no girls had gone to school till then though there was a school in the main village, one and a half kilometres away. Likewise in village-2 girls did not attend school till one opened in the village itself in 1997.

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[36]Though the rule of the opening of only co-educational schools was not announced formally, all the schools, at primary level, opened after the introduction of the EGS scheme were based on the norms of the EGS, thus were co-educational. Similarly, instead of opening new middle schools the existing primary schools and the EGS schools were upgraded to middle schools in the state. All the EGS schools of the state were upgraded to primary schools. However, in 2008 the rules for the opening of schools at primary level were revised. According to the new policy a primary school could be opened in a village/habitation not having primary school facility within one kilometre of distance and with 40 children of the 5 to 11 years age group. Further, a satellite school (having class one to three) could be opened in a village/habitation having no primary school facility within one kilometre of distance and with ten children of the 5 to 9 years age group. The satellite school remains attached to the nearby primary school and children study in the main primary school after completing class three in the satellite school (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2008c).
[37]In Madhya Pradesh habitations are very scattered and spread out. A village or the revenue village may consist of several hamlets or habitations which may be situated on average half a kilometre to eight kilometres away from the main village.

In village-1 the mother of four daughters who never went to school said, 'Uh … there was no school here' (Bhuri), when I asked about the reason for their non-enrolment. Consequently when the school opened in the village the parents were happy about this. This was reflected in the account of one of the mothers, 'It is good that the school opened in our hamlet, otherwise how could the girls have studied?' (Bhuri) Though the opening of the school in the village was welcomed by each and everyone, the fact that some of the girls of the families in my sample had never been to school or had discontinued school shows that the initial euphoria about the school did not persist among the villagers. As indicated by Aggarwal (2000) the proximity of a school to a habitation does not guarantee the attendance of all children, more specifically girls (see also Vaidyanathan and Nair, 2001; Kelly and Elliot, 1982).

Among the mothers, seven were aware of the exact number of classes provided in their village school, whereas the remaining five did not know up to which class the school provided education. The only father who did not know the number of classes in the village school was 50 years old and illiterate himself. The mothers who did not know were likewise illiterate and two of them belonged to the category of the ST. 11 out of the 12 fathers in my sample were aware of the level to which classes were provided by the school in their village. A father in the first village of my sample said, 'Uh …, the school in the main village has classes up to 8th and in our hamlet the EGS school has classes …up to 5th' (Bhima). Though eight of the fathers in my sample were illiterate, seven of them had knowledge about the school in their village and the classes it provided. The difference between fathers' and mothers' level of knowledge about the school indicates that due to men's exposure and involvement in outside activities male community members tended to have more knowledge about issues pertaining to the public sphere such as the school than women, who remain confined to their home and are engaged mostly in home-based activities apart from their waged labour status.

Students' enrolment status in sample villages

The enrolment status of the students in the sample villages is presented in Table 4.1. It shows the enrolment figure of the schools according to the school enrolment register and Table 4.2 gives the actual scenario of the enrolment of the schools based on my observation.

Table: 4.1 Number of students enrolled in the sample villages, based on the school register.

Village	Enrolment status									
	SC*		ST*		OBC*		General		Total	
	B*	G*	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
Village - 1	5	5	10	14	8	10	4	6	27	35
Village - 2	4	2	12	12	11	7	3	4	30	25
Village - 3	8	6	10	12	7	8	3	4	28	30
Total	17	13	32	38	26	25	10	14	85	90

*SC - Schedule Caste, ST- Schedule Tribe, OBC- Other Backward Classes
*B - Boys, G- Girls

Table: 4.2 Number of students enrolled in the sample villages, based on my observation.

Village	Enrolment status									
	SC		ST		OBC		General		Total	
	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
Village – 1	3	3	8	7	6	6	2	2	24	18
Village – 2	4	3	11	7	9	4	3	2	27	16
Village - 3	4	5	9	8	8	7	4	2	25	22
Total	11	11	28	22	23	17	9	6	76	56

While calculating the actual enrolment of the students I eliminated the children whom I found not attending school consecutively for a period of four months[38] in the previous academic year (i.e. 2007-2008). As can be observed from the above tables, there was a considerable gap between the actual number of students enrolled in the schools and the data produced by the schools. According to the data from the schools 85 boys and 90 girls (the number of girls was even higher than that of boys) were enrolled in all three villages, but in actual fact 76 boys and 56 girls were enrolled in the schools. This shows the glaring gender gap between boys and girls. None of the parents I interviewed were in a

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[38]This calculation was done by referring to the students' attendance register of the school, discussing it with the teachers and by subsequent discussion with the concerned family members. Referring to the attendance register was not considered solely for this purpose as teachers tend to register children as present according to a complex set of factors which does not only relate to children's actual attendance but also to considerations such as ensuring adequate numbers of present children etc. which I shall discuss in chapter 6 and 7.

position to comment on the enrolment status of the school as they considered this something which they should not be bothered about. For them, this was the teacher's domain and they had nothing to say about it. Mostly they answered my enquiry about this issue with, 'Who knows'? (Mansingh, Bapulal, Chanda) or 'I don't know, the teacher must know' (Partu, Kanta, Bhuri).

The reasons for this gap between the rhetoric and the actual enrolment situation in primary schools are manifold: according to the policy of the state government teachers have to maintain students' names who remain absent for a long period on the register even if they have virtually dropped out. The state policy advocates continuous efforts by teachers to motivate parents and bring the students back, and not to strike off the student's name from the attendance register (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2008a). While the second part of the policy was observed by the teachers religiously, the first part was mostly ignored as it involves a tremendous amount of commitment and time to persuade parents. Second, when there is pressure from the higher offices of the department of education to increase the enrolment and reduce the number of dropouts and never-enrolled children, teachers have the tendency to 'fudge figures, [and treat] mere entry of the names of children in the school admission register' as children attending school (Jhingran, 2004: n. p.). Third, in recent years, teachers have been inclined to increase the enrolment numbers, especially of girls, as evident from the data of my sample villages, due to the fact that many incentives are targeted towards girls. For example girls are provided with free uniforms and the school receives funds based on its enrolment of girls. These funds and facilities are sometimes misappropriated by the teachers. This indicates the corruption prevalent in the system. Fourth, when parents and the community remain aloof by not interfering in the matters of the school, teachers tend to take advantage of the situation and act according to their own convenience and interests.

School infrastructure

The schools in all the three sample villages had a school building from the government. However the number of classrooms was inadequate. Village-3 had two classrooms for instructional purposes whereas in the other two villages the schools had only one classroom. The schools had no other room for the non-teaching activities or for the

teacher. In EGS schools where there was only one classroom, students of class one and two normally sit on the outside veranda whilst students of class three to five occupy the only classroom that the school has. During the rainy season in particular, the classroom becomes very crowded and noisy when students of all the classes have to fit into it. As mentioned by a father of my sample, 'It has a building, the building is good … uh ... but it has only two rooms, children of three classes sit in one room. You know, they keep shouting all the time' (Bansu). Maina, a mother, complained about the lack of proper seating arrangements in the school due to the shortage of classrooms and mentioned, 'No, they [the school] have only one room. All the children, small and big, sit in one room, what will they study in this condition?' This mother, though not very assertive about other issues such as how useful education is for girls, was very strong in her opinion about the poor infrastructure of the school as she thought without proper facilities not much learning could happen.

Other than three fathers and one mother, none of the parents complained much about the infrastructure available in the school. The fact that the school in their village had only one or two classrooms did not bother them. For example Kalu said, 'It has a good building, two rooms, what else is required'? A mother in the same village said, 'Yes, the [school] building is there', and regarding the classrooms she said, 'They have only two rooms [classrooms] but they are managing with that' (Sabri). Even in village-1 and village-2 where there was only one classroom in the school, other than two fathers and one mother, the parents did not react much to this situation. For instance, when I asked whether there were enough classrooms in the school, Chanda said, 'Yeah, there are' and a father in the same village said, 'Yeah, the building and the [class] room is good, no problem in that' (Mangu). These reactions of parents may be a function of the fact that first, their own houses consist of just one or two rooms, where the entire family of four to seven members lives. Second, they do not realise the importance of having a separate classroom for each class due to their own illiterate status. Third, as their knowledge about school is

based on the model they had in and around their own village and they saw all the schools having only one or at most two classrooms, they took this as an acceptable norm and did not view it critically.

The utility of the knowledge acquired in school
Enjoying school

When I asked whether the girls who attended school enjoyed being there, all the parents in my sample expressed their inability to talk about this. For example, one of the fathers mused, 'Ah … umm … enjoy? Umm, I don't know whether she liked it in school or what she liked there, she was going, that's all' (Mansingh). Similarly Mohni in village-3 said, 'They were going [to school], they must be happy, who knows'?

Though the parents showed a certain indifferent attitude towards the school experience of their daughters, the girls in my sample had a different story to tell. They recalled their school days very fondly and said that they were happy at school. One of the girls for instance said, 'Yes, I liked it. Going to school, talking to friends, studying and everything' (Madhu). The four girls in my sample who had been to school previously mentioned school as a place where they could be with their friends. Talking to friends and doing things that they liked to do were some of the motivational factors for girls to be in school. A girl of 14 years who had dropped out after class two in village-3 for example said:

> I liked it there, playing, jumping, singing, we were studying sometimes, then we were playing. (Radha)

Another girl of ten years of age gave a different reason for liking being in school. For her, the noise made by the children in school was very attractive. She said:

> Yes, I like when all the children shout, boys shout more. In the house it is very silent, when everybody goes out it becomes very silent, so I like school, all shouting, talking and laughing. (Sugandh)

Silence, according to her, pervaded her life at home where she had to take care of her younger sibling of three years old during the day when her parents were away at work. The inability to be in the company of children of her own age group promoted her good memories of the school.

Other than being with friends, the fact that school provides a space for girls to be away from the burden of work, whether inside or outside the home, and thereby relax, was the reason for them to look forward to school. The four girls I talked to who had been to school expressed an emphatic 'yes', when I asked whether they would like to go to school again. Similarly the two girls who had never been to school, were also enthusiastic about going to school. One of them said:

> Yes, I always wanted to go to school and study. When I see others going to school, some of my friends go to school so when I see them going and studying I too feel like going. (Seema)

Obviously, the child in them was eager to be a part of the group that enjoys the freedom that school provides and to be away from the burden of work. The influence of peer groups during adolescence has been recognized by researchers (Handel, 1988 and Damon, 1988) who suggest that 'friendship shapes a person's self-image, providing the child with a context in which he[/she] can learn an appropriate self-image to present in social situations' (Handel, 1988: 192). Peer groups also give them a 'sense of community and "we-ness," which is extremely important in their acquisition of a sense of social structure' (Cicourel, 1974 in Corsaro, 1988: 204). Peer group life and socialization, factors not taken into account by their parents, were critical to the girls' enjoyment of school and to their desire to attend. These were at least as – if not more – important than what the children were actually taught in school.

What are children taught?

The students at the primary level were taught four subjects in accordance with the curriculum designed by the state department of education. The subjects include Hindi, English, Mathematics and Environmental Studies. The parents I interviewed, both mothers and fathers, were mostly unaware of the subjects taught in school. Only two of the fathers, who happened to be literates, out of the total of 12 knew the subjects that the children were taught. All the mothers irrespective of their age or literacy status did not. They had a general sense of what children might learn and expressed this in terms of certain basic things such as the multiplication table, numbers and the alphabet. Almost all of them (ten fathers and 12 mothers) had the same thing to say concerning what their children were taught in school, i.e., 'They study *ginti* (counting numbers), *pahadas*

(multiplication tables) and alphabet too' (Kanta), and a father in another village said, 'Umm…they learn like,….alphabet, *pahadas* and *ginti* also they do. And [they] learn to read books' (Mansingh). For the parents in my sample, mathematics was symbolised as counting numbers and multiplication tables and language learning referred to the alphabet and reading books.

The impact of the illiteracy of the parents on the education of their children was clearly visible here (Kurosaki, Ito, Fuwa, *et al*., 2006). Their illiteracy status prevented them from being engaged with their children's education in a more active manner. Certain policies (Government of India, 2008a: 157) claim that there are provisions under which it is explained to parents what their children learn. They also go further in claiming that parents are trained in how to monitor their children's academic achievements. Irrespective of the existence of these policy provisions, in the case of my sample, the parents were unaware of what their children were taught. Thus expecting parents to monitor the academic progress of their children when they do not even know what the children are supposed to learn, seems to be rather unrealistic and at the same time highlights the need to implement provisions that might increase parents' involvement in school education.

Knowledge and literacy

Along with the proximity of the school to the residence of girls, the perception of the relevance of the education provided in school for the lives of the girls had far-reaching impacts on decisions regarding their education. Girls' education was valued by most of the interviewees in my research (eleven fathers and ten mothers). Only three, one father and two mothers, did not attach any value to educating their daughters. Thus to my question about her opinion about school education for girls and its usefulness one of the latter mothers said, 'What will they do out of study'? (Bhuri) Likewise the other woman in my research who shared that opinion said:

> What will they [girls] do by going to school? What will these girls do by studying? (Ratni)

Both these mothers entirely rejected the notion of education as useful in the lives of girls; for them there was no need for girls to be educated. The traditional roles that girls and

women have in the family and within the domestic set up such as child rearing and taking care of other family members made them devalue education which they did not see related to these tasks. The only father in my sample who had a similar view, said:

> Nuh … not much, ultimately they have to do the housework, they are not going to read or write once they are married, what will they do? (Mangu)

This father's account reinforced what the women may have intended to convey. From their perspective, the girls eventually have to get married and get involved in activities related to the house, their children and other members of the family; as a result they need no formal education. The traditional roles of girls and women as perceived by these parents do not require any skills imparted through formal education, and they therefore considered education as not useful or not worth pursuing.

In contrast, the parents who valued education attached social, functional and economic benefits to it. Four main factors emerged as the perceived benefits of education for girls here. These related to a) the level of girls' knowledge, b) the social standing of the girls, c) maintaining a private life of their own and, d) girls' ability to negotiate the public sphere in terms of transport and business interactions with others.

Certain parents affixed much value to knowledge in the lives of girls. For them girls could increase their knowledge base through education and would, in turn, understand things better. For example, one of the mothers said:

> They [girls] should, they should study, now-a-days all should study. If they study, uh … they will understand everything, they will know so many things, become more understanding. (Chanda)

This mother recognised a certain, non-specific gain from education in the form of 'knowing things'. She attached much value to this as according to her, if girls know things, then people 'will not tell that they [girls] don't know anything and will also not scold them' (Chanda). As a woman herself, she knew the life of girls and future women in a highly patriarchal family in an Indian context who are often ill-treated and scolded in

the name of 'not knowing' anything. She expressed the desire that girls should not suffer that fate.

Apart from 'knowing things', becoming 'literate' and thus escalating their social standing was also very important for girls according to certain mothers. Thus in village-2 one of the mothers, while talking about why her daughters should go to school, said:

> If they go to school they will learn so many things, they will not be illiterate like me…You know, while watching TV I do not understand so many things what they say, … because I am illiterate. If they study they can understand everything. (Kamli)

'Not to remain illiterate' was repeatedly highlighted; for example, one of the mothers in the third village said, '[If they study,] they will not be illiterate like me' (Kanta). The accounts of these mothers indicate that they were not content with their own illiterate status and moreover were not willing to leave their daughters to lead the life that they had lived which was reflected in them saying 'illiterate like me'. The mothers' sense of disadvantage derived from illiteracy was clearly articulated.

To be 'literate' was considered by these women as something which could improve the position of girls and women in society. Some of the mothers mentioned the usefulness of education for girls and women to gain respect. Chanda for instance said, 'People will respect them, they will not tell them they are illiterate'. Likewise, Kanta put it this way, 'Now-a-days people look at the educated girls with respect, that's why'.

The mothers I interviewed wanted to send their daughters to school in order to give them the opportunity of a better life than they themselves had had, where they would be treated more equally. They acknowledged the empowering role of education, especially in being assertive and in negotiating an unjust world from a position of strength. Thus one respondent said:

> Umm, … you know, I mean, they can stand equally like their husbands. [If they are educated] then the husbands also will not treat them as their subordinates. (Rami)

Like the mothers, the girls in my research too valued school education. For them, education was a tool for gaining knowledge. This was reflected when a girl said, 'There

are a lot of benefits of studying. We can read books and get a lot of information' (Rekha), and Radha said: 'They [girls] will get brainy, their brain will get sharper'. These girls recognised the importance of education for them. At the same time they acknowledged the importance of 'being literate' for a girl as they thought it was one way to become considered a respectable member of society. Therefore one girl reiterated the point mentioned by the women respondents in my research when she said, 'They [girls] should study, so that nobody can say that they do not know anything or they are illiterate' (Madhu).

Both most mothers and the girls in my research attached much value to education and recognised the social benefits of it, specially its usefulness in negating the view of women as 'illiterate' and 'not knowing anything'. For them having an education was the key to unlocking a future life with more respect and status in the family, both in their parents' family and in their in-laws' family.

The social benefit of education in the life of a girl was also emphasised by three of the fathers. For example, one of them said, 'If they study, they will be educated, they will learn how to talk and will be aware of everything' (Kalu).

Most fathers in my research referred to the functional benefit of education in their daughters' lives in terms of maintaining a private life and remaining connected with their biological parents. This was also valued by half of the mothers of my sample. This was revealed when one of them said:

> They [girls] can write letters to us when they are with their in-laws, if their brother writes to them they can read that, they need not ask others to read their letter. (Nanalal)

The importance of girls' becoming self-reliant in reading and writing was pointed out by this father who believed education could empower girls and free them from the burden of dependency on others. It could lead them to maintain their privacy. More importantly, educated girls could maintain their relationship with their biological family through writing letters. The same aspect was also raised by a girl in the first village of my sample, who said:

> Umm, they should study so that they can write a letter to their parents and brothers from their in-laws in case something goes wrong, if they or their husband falls sick or some problem like that. (Seema)

To remain connected with the biological family and to ask for help at a time of need became possible once the girls learnt to read and write as pointed out by this girl aged 12 who had never been to school.

The above accounts of my respondents reveal that the ultimate destiny of a girl, as perceived by them, was to join her husband's family. The fact that they could not imagine any other situation where girls could use their skills of writing indicates the narrowness and specificity of the gender expectation that the community had in place.

Other than writing letters to parents and remaining connected with the biological family, education was also perceived as useful for girls in negotiating the public sphere. My interviewees gave the example of practical situations related to the public sphere such as commuting and using public transport where girls could use their knowledge if educated. According to one of the fathers:

> If they are going out, for the bus they need not ask anybody, they can find the bus by themselves; can read the board on the bus, there are benefits of studying. (Kalu)

The importance of a girl becoming independent and self-reliant was accepted by those respondents who acknowledged the empowering role of education. One of the mothers mentioned another practical aspect of education. For her, education could lead to the emancipation of girls and women so they would not be cheated by others:

> Yes, they can write their name, no need to give thumbprint; they can read the amount they are receiving after work so nobody can cheat them. (Mohni)

Her account pointed towards an unjust world where the educated take advantage of the illiterate status of poor villagers and try to deceive them whenever possible. This woman had learnt the significance of reading and writing from her own life experience as she had been cheated and was paid less than the amount she deserved when she gave her thumbprint to the contractor for whom she worked. Consequently, she thought girls should be educated so that they would not get cheated in their lives. She also highlighted the social recognition girls/women get when they sign a register or any document rather

than give a thumbprint. This issue was also recognised by Mishra, according to whom the 'ability to read is seen as a necessity to calculate wages and rates, to know what one is signing, to access information, and above all, to walk with one's head high' (2005: 72).

Though the importance of education was highlighted by most of the participants, it is interesting to note that majority of them, both fathers and mothers, referred to education only up to class two to five for girls. When discussing the level up to which girls should attend school the distribution of responses among my interviewees was as follows:

Table: 4.3 Class up to which parents considered education for girls desirable.

Class	Mothers	Fathers
Up to class 2 - 3	2	3
Up to class 3 - 4	4	2
Up to class 5	2	2
Up to class 6	1	2
Beyond class 9	0	2

As evident from Table 4.3, amongst the parents, two mothers and three fathers were of the opinion that girls should study only up to class two to three. Mohni said, 'Class…two to three years they should go. This much at least they should study'. And another father said, 'They should … go … up to second or class three' (Rangji). Four mothers and two fathers were of the view that for girls studying up to class three to four was enough. Further, for two mothers and two of the fathers, completing class five was important for girls. Two of the fathers and one mother thought that not only completing class five but going for further classes such as class six was crucial for girls. Kanta, the only mother in this group said, 'They …should study till class five, six, like that'. While none of the mothers recommended more classes than six for girls, only two of the fathers recommended the education of girls beyond class nine. According to Kamal, 'They should study minimum up to class ten'.

The only mother in my research who although she suggested that girls should study, could not articulate the class, up to which they should go, said:

> I don't know much but they should study, ah…up to…the level that they can know what is good and what is bad, can understand things better. (Chanda)

Significantly, mothers were more likely to be content with lower schooling levels than fathers.

There were several reasons why parents thought girls should study only up to a maximum of class six or less and not beyond that. When I asked the parents why girls should not study beyond the class that they recommended, two of them, one father and one mother in village one and two respectively, held the view that since there was no school in their village for classes further than five, girls were restricted up to that. The mother in village-2 reacted to my enquiry of why she thought girls should not study beyond class five by saying:

> They should but if there is no school then what will they do? … By class five they become big, grown-ups … how can they go to far off places, parents will not allow girls. (Rami)

The same view was reflected in the account of the only father who pointed out the lack of availability of a middle school in the village as the reason for girls not studying more than class five. He said:

> Girls ... yeah, they should study, girls of *Ambapada* are studying in class six and seven, now-a-days girls are studying. ... They should study up to class six. But, you know, in our village it [middle school] is not there so they have to stop after class five. (Partu)

If there was no school available in the immediate vicinity from girls' residence, their parents viewed this as reason enough to stop their education. As one mother in my research pointed out, girls, by the time they finish their primary education, are considered grown-ups and thus are vulnerable if they are sent alone to another village to attend school. Concern for the safety of girls becomes paramount for parents and thus education takes a secondary position. This fear factor, to be discussed further below, in the minds of parents was also revealed in the account of Partu when he said in the context of his own daughter:

> I mean, she is a girl, I cannot send her alone. Things are not safe with the girls. ... In case something happens then it is a problem, life of the girl, you know. ... I cannot take a chance, how can I?

The fear that girls will be sexually harassed on their way to school if they have to travel to another village makes parents withdraw girls from school. Though both this father and mother in my research did not say anything openly about girls getting sexually harassed, they indicated it by saying 'in case something happens then it is a problem'. After reaching puberty, which was usually referred as 'becoming big' or 'grown-up', the

parents viewed their daughters as sexually vulnerable especially on their way to, and in school.

Thus the majority of the parents (six fathers and six mothers) cited girls becoming 'big' or 'grown up' as the reason for not being allowed to attend school.

Several things other than their safety are associated with girls becoming grown-up. First, they are considered ready to be sent to their in-laws. One of the fathers pointed this out, 'By the time they [girls] finish class five they are big, … big enough, so they do not go to school. Girls then go to their house [in-laws'], you know' (Partu). Similar views were also expressed by a mother who thought that grown-up girls do not attend school. According to her:

> Devli: Grown-up girls do not go [to school]. The parents will not let them go.
> Q: Why do parents not let them go?
> Devli: …Yeah, … Parents will not let them go. They will send them to the in-laws.

Sending girls to the in-laws as soon as puberty was reached was common. As going to the in-laws is considered the ultimate destination of girls in an Indian context, parents think this is more important than sending them to school. Once at the in-laws' house, these girls will no longer be eligible for schooling.

Second, preparing the girls for their in-laws' house was also important for their parents, rather than educating them in formal schools. Learning how to do household chores before joining the in-laws was crucial for girls from their parents' perspective. As this father said, 'Umm … ah … when they grow big then they stop going, they have to be at home. They have to learn things in the house' (Bapulal).

Parents feared that their daughters would be treated badly by their in-laws if not prepared to face married life and the roles and duties they would have to perform in the household. Thus one of the mothers said:

> They have to go to their in-laws or not? They have to learn all the work at home. That is why big girls remain at home and learn things, all the work, before they go to their house. If they do not learn, their in-laws will scold them every moment. (Kanta)

Keeping girls at home and teaching them domestic labour was thus seen as a means of protecting them from potential future harm at the hands of the in-laws. Third, when girls

are little bigger they are considered an easy replacement for their mother to work at home as well as outside the home to earn some money. Working at home serves two purposes: one, the mother becomes free to go out for wage earning and two, girls learn things that they are expected to be doing for the rest of their lives. Two of the mothers specifically emphasised the aspect of girls getting involved in wage earning by the time they grow up. One of them said:

> Grown-up girls need to work. I don't think they need studying more than that [class 5]? When they are big they need to work and help their parents, they need to contribute to the family earning. How could we manage otherwise? … They are not boys, you know, they are girls, they will go to their house soon. So before going to their house they should help parents, they should earn till they are here. (Mohni)

This woman pointed towards parents' expectation that their daughters would add to the family earnings by taking up wage labour. Her account indicated that parents by themselves are not capable of meeting the economic needs of the family members, and children, especially girls have to pitch in to help the family financially.

The relevance of education for girls and women beyond a certain class was questioned by a few of the parents (three fathers and two mothers). One of the fathers in this group had this to say:

> Uh hum ... beyond that ... what will they do? That much ... is ok. They should know a bit of reading and writing, ... otherwise what will they do with more reading? (Rangji)

Similarly, Moti also viewed education beyond class three as not desirable for girls as they have to perform the household tasks in future. For her, girls remained in school when they were small and after completing around four years schooling they start working as by then they are big enough. As girls, after marriage, are engaged only in domestic activities at their in-laws' house, studying beyond primary level seemed irrelevant to their future life as home-makers.

> Study is required but more than three to four years is not required for girls … they have to go to their in-laws. There also they have to do the housework and go for work in the field, so … they do not go for more study. (Moti)

Parents' expectation that girls take up a particularly circumscribed role involving household chores and working in the field led them to think that school education beyond primary classes was not a requisite.

All the girls in my research recommended studying up to class five or even more for girls. Three of them, one of whom had never been to school, thought that girls should study up to class five. One who too had never had the opportunity to attend school thought that girls should study up to class ten, whereas the other two advocated class 12 or even more. One said, 'They should study more than class 12 or even more than that also' (Sunita). The girls saw the benefit of getting educated as a tool to achieve something in life. Sunita said, 'They [girls] should study, if they study more they can become teachers, engineers and even doctors'.

Though the girls aspired to being in school, and some even wished to become doctors or engineers, they felt powerless before their parents' decision to remain at home and take up the responsibilities entrusted to them. This was revealed by Seema (who had never been to school) when I asked her whether she had ever let her parents know that she wanted to study, 'Why should I invite a beating for myself? I know they will say no. No, I cannot tell them what I want'. Her account indicated that the girls themselves did not feel in a position to take decisions regarding their study, their aspirations and to do what they liked. They had to follow the instructions of the elders in their family. As part of their up-bringing they internalized the fact that they would always have to obey and follow what their parents told them to do. Thus Sunita said:

> I want to but my parents do not want it so I thought if my parents do not want it then it is ok, why should I go for it, [smiles] I cannot do that so I am not thinking about that. Now, even I am not in school.

This interviewee said that she wanted to be a teacher and thought that girls could become doctors, teachers or engineers if they study. But she found herself helpless when withdrawn from school after class five, to go against the decision of her parents regarding her schooling. She was not in a position even to tell her parents that she wanted to study further.

> Q: Did you ever insist that you want to study?
> Sunita: No, I cannot do that, they [parents] said, so I have to obey them.

Like the other girl interviewees, this one too had no sense of being able to resist her parents' injunction.

The account of the girls also revealed the inferior treatment that they received from their parents because of their gender. They could see that the boys in their family and in the

village could attend school without any problem whereas all the restrictions were faced by the girls. One of them described how boys enjoyed a superior status to girls regarding their schooling experience and said:

> Yes, for boys no problem. Nobody stops them going to school unless they themselves think so. Parents always want boys to be in school and study but they are always against girls going to school, especially when girls grow big. (Seema)

This differential treatment of children based on their gender was also clearly reflected in the responses of my parent interviewees who held different views regarding the value of education for boys and for girls. One of the fathers for instance said, 'Boys should [study], they should … go up to high school and higher secondary' (Rangji). Another father in the same village also held this particular view, 'Boys should study as much as possible, after class 12 also they should continue their study' (Mansingh). Similarly, one of the mothers insisted that boys should be allowed to study as long as they wished to and nobody should stop them going to school. She said, 'Why should I stop their [boys] going [to school]? …They will go till the class they want to study' (Maina). Boys were invariably expected to study longer than girls. After completing class five boys were considered by parents old enough to go to a school located in another village by themselves but in the case of girls the situation was completely reversed as indicated above in the responses of the parents. This asymmetry in gender perceptions was a persistent feature in my interviewees' responses, articulated as 'natural' by the parents but complained about by the girls.

It is also interesting to note here that the initial response of the parents to the question about the importance of education was always positive, including in relation to education for girls. But a deeper probe always showed that when parents spoke in general terms, they affirmed the value of education for girls, but when it came to their own family and daughter, they thought differently. For example, a father of four daughters who professed that girls should study up to class five had not allowed the oldest two girls to go to school and his third daughter too dropped out in class three. When asked about why his older daughters could not go to school he said, 'Uhm ... that time I did not think all this, they were at home and doing the housework, then they became big' (Bapulal). In another family too the oldest daughter never attended school and the second daughter was withdrawn when she was in class four as by that time the oldest had got married. The marriage of the oldest daughter and her joining her in-laws required the second one to be

at home to take up the former's domestic responsibilities. The mother of this family remarked about the dropping out of the second daughter from school: 'Nuh, … she is a girl, she is grown up now, she finished her study'. And regarding the oldest daughter she said, 'Nuh, she did not go [to school], she was at home … yeah, then she got married' (Sugna). She revealed the fact that the family always needed a girl at home to look after the household. The oldest daughter who did not attend school at all was initially doing this, and this allowed her younger sister to go to school. However, as soon as the older one was married and moved out of the house, the younger daughter was required to be at home to shoulder her responsibilities. Her mother said:

> Sugna: Nuh ... she is a girl, studied up to fourth class. Then ... her sister was married, she went to her in-laws as they wanted her there immediately ... so she went to her in-laws. And then Anita [second daughter] had to stay at home.
> Q: Why?
> Sugna: Sunita [oldest daughter] went you know, so she [second daughter] had to stay home, nobody else is there [at home], she has to look after the work at home now.

As the responses of my participants, both mothers and fathers, revealed, though they professed the value of education for girls in general up to a certain extent, their decision regarding their own daughters' education was affected by several factors such as 'girls are needed at home', 'grown up girls do not attend school' or 'school is not available at a safe distance'. Here general views contradicted specific practices and the unquestioned assumption that at least one female child should be at home to do domestic chores.

Although the self-esteem that women gain from becoming 'literate' was recognised by the women participants, both the male and female interviewees who did mention the significance of education in the life of girls and women, highlighted that acquiring the skill of writing and a little reading was enough for girls rather than going for higher education. As the value attached to education and the expectation of parents from schooling was limited to that of literacy and numeracy skills, the parents mostly recommended education for girls up to class three. Most parents in the cohort were willing to send their daughters to school long enough to obtain the status of 'literate' (here meaning the ability to write one's name) but were hesitant to support girls for further education which requires longer immersion and concomitantly greater expenditure of resources and effort. Parents withdraw their girls from school before they completed or

just after they completed primary-level education. Table 4.4 gives a detailed account of when and why the girls in my sample were withdrawn from school by their parents.

Table: 4.4 Details of when and why girls in the sample households dropped out of school.

Number of girls	Class in which dropped out	Age at dropping out (in year)	Age at the time of interview (in year)	Reason for dropping out
2	1	8, 7	14, 10	Required at home to help Taking care of younger sibling
2	2	7, 7	8, 7	Irresponsible teacher. Engaged in housework.
6	3	4 at age 9, 2 at age 8	3 aged 10, two aged 11	Irresponsible teacher (1) Grown-up (5) Required at home (4) Labour (4)
1	4	10	11	Required at home as elder sister went to the in-laws.
2	5	11, 10	17, 12	No middle school in village (2) Grown-up (2)

As is apparent from Table 4.4, during the early years at the age of five to nine years, girls were allowed to attend school as they were considered young and could not be entrusted with any major tasks. For example, Chanda said of her six-year old daughter who was in school at the time of the interview, 'Yes, Mamta is going, she is small you know, what will she do at home now?' Another mother who thought girls should be in school for at least two to three years, when asked why girls should go up to that, said, 'Going to the school is good. What will they do otherwise when they are small? They cannot work that time, in the school at least they will learn something' (Mohni). Parents thus took a functional approach to schooling, seeing it as a useful tool to caretake their small children for an albeit very limited period of time.

As the girls grew older they were withdrawn from school for reasons ranging from taking care of younger siblings, required at home for work, to taking up wage labour and the non-availability of a school in the village. By the time the girls became eight to ten years old they were considered grown up and eligible for working at home and as wage labourers. Thus they were made to work rather than attend school. Mishra asserts this aspect when he writes that 'in India, it is common for older girls to be kept at home to look after younger siblings, and they often miss out on schooling altogether'(2005: 186).

Older girls were withdrawn from school when a new child was born or when the younger children became too burdensome for their mother. Two girls in my sample were withdrawn from school even at the age of seven to take care of younger siblings or to look after the family. Birth order therefore emerged as a critical factor in parents' decision to send their daughters to school. Most of the first-born girls were either withheld or withdrawn from school in order to take up household responsibilities. In contrast, their brothers who were either older or younger than they, irrespective of their birth order, were enrolled in school. This clearly indicates the discrimination girls experience in being excluded from education based on their gender. As Pandey puts it, 'in cultures with strong segregation of sex roles, the work tasks of girls and boys are not usually interchangeable, although if crossover is required, it is more likely that girls will do boys' tasks' (2004: 79). My data revealed the same story: girls were expected to be engaged in activities that their mother would do and at the same time they were also engaged in wage labour to supplement the family earning which supposedly was the main task of the male members of the family. Thus the cultural aspiration that men should be the breadwinners in the family was contradicted by the economic realities of these villagers' lives which meant that the senior male members' wages were insufficient to maintain their families and required input from the female family members.

As the 'gender roles often make functional sense in the way family life is organised' and since the beliefs of the community 'about social roles are assimilated from childhood', it is difficult to redefine these gender roles (Pandey, 2004: 86). Moreover as Chanana argues, this community perceives the goal for girls and women to be 'wifehood and motherhood' (1993: 87), and they therefore do not consider school education as relevant to their daughters' life. My data contradict Chanana's view to a certain extent by suggesting that parents at least theoretically do want their daughters to move beyond illiteracy - this was emphasised by majority of my participants (eleven fathers and ten mothers). However, a number among them also supported Chanana's view. This was reflected in one of the mothers' accounts:

> And what will they do after studying? They have to get married and only
> raise children. And for this, no study is required … we never studied but we
> are doing all this (Sugna).

These parents made little connection between the role of wife and mother, and education. They saw the two as entirely unrelated.

From the narratives of my research participants it is clear that parents' understanding of the relevance of education in girls' life has an influential role to play in the decision-making process of inclusion or exclusion of girls in school education. Although theoretically in favour of girls' education up to a certain level, these parents could not see a connection between their daughters' future social roles and their education. These roles, however, were not the only ones of importance in shaping the parents' decision. A further issue, to which I now turn, concerned the relation between girls' employment and their education.

Knowledge and the job market

Dhagamwar observes that 'for poor children only a job will make education relevant' (2006: 87). My data too reveal the high value attached to education as a means of obtaining a job. The parents in my research by and large emphasised the importance of obtaining a job after completing one's education without which according to them, a key purpose of getting an education was defeated. Thus, to investigate how issues concerning education and work were framed, I inquired about their perception of the interplay between education and employment and the gender differences therein. All of the parents in my research reported that their main hope in sending their sons to school was to secure a job in future. In the worst case, if boys were not able to get paid employment, they could start some kind of business to earn their livelihood. One of the fathers described it in the following way:

> Yeah, boys have to study minimum class ten, after that if they want they should study more. After that … now-a-days as there is no job available easily, if they study a little, be little educated, then they can do some business of their own also. (Bansu)

Another father made a similar point when he explained why he wanted his sons to study up to a minimum of class 12. He said:

> They will become educated, learn several things and get jobs, if not getting a job they can set up a shop or some business to earn enough for eating and other requirements. If they are uneducated then what will they do? How will they eat? Will they spend their entire life by taking cattle for grazing? (Kalu)

 Another father also strongly recommended education for boys, associating it very closely with getting a job. He said, 'He is a boy, they have to study. They have to know about the things happening around them, they have to learn. How will they get a job otherwise?' (Mangu)

The narratives of these fathers suggest that they aspired to a better life for their sons than they had had. They perceived getting a job as a means to secure their sons this life and thought that the route to this was education. Thus Kalu added that education was a means for having a 'better life' for his sons and continued:

> That is why we parents are sending them (sons) by any means. If we have to beat them to send them to school, that also we do … with the hope that if they study then they can get into some business or job. They will have a better life than we had. They will not have to do daily labour like us.

Like the fathers, the desire for securing a 'better life' for their sons was also very strong among the mothers. When I asked how important it is to study and get a job for a boy, one of the mothers replied:

> What will they eat otherwise? Will they do the same labour, like us? Our life was spent doing manual labour, if they study they will get a job and will not suffer like we suffered. (Sabri)

She acknowledged the suffering the older generation underwent in their life as illiterates and as manual labourers which she did not want to pass on to her sons. However, in the case of daughters, only five fathers and three mothers out of 24 parents (12 each) thought that education might lead to securing a job for their daughters. To my question, 'why should they [girls] study up to that [class four or five]?' one of the fathers responded, 'Why? Uhm … if they are studying only class one, they will not know anything, class four and five they have to study, then only they will understand things, read books and can know everything, uh … can get small job also' (Bapulal). Though he could not spell out what he meant by a 'small job', this did indicate that there was clear gender segregation in terms of not only their education, but also future job prospects for girls.

In my interviewees' parlance, a 'job' meant formal employment. They made a clear distinction between a 'job' as a kind of formal employment and 'work', working as a daily labourer in the informal sector. According to them a 'job' or employment in the formal sector involved the public sphere and so was not suitable for girls/women. A substantial number of the parents (15) were of the opinion that girls should not go for a 'job'. One of the mothers for example said, 'No … girls do not do jobs, they go for work in the field, in the house' (Devli). A similar reaction came from another female member of the community who said, 'In our society girls do not do jobs, they go for labour and work in the house'. The parents of my cohort also did not envisage girls becoming self-

employed or starting a business after their education. One of the fathers strongly came out with this view when he said, 'Will the girls go and sit in the market to do a business? Boys can do that' (Kalu).

Since Indian culture, especially among rural populations, obstructs women's participation in jobs in the formal sector such as in stores and factories, the informal sector is preferred (Dunlop and Velkoff, 1999: 2). Dunlop and Velkoff argue that the cultural rules in India such as the practice of *purdah*, 'the veiling and seclusion of women', constrains their access to employment in the formal sector. Although the cultural restrictions put on women are changing, their participation in employment outside the home is considered as 'slightly inappropriate, subtly wrong, and definitely dangerous to their chastity and womanly virtue' (Dube and Palriwala, 1990 in Dunlop and Velkoff, 1999: 2). Formal employment in both the public and private sectors thus continues to be dominated by men. Along with the cultural restrictions imposed on women, the shortage of job opportunities in general, as observed by Dunlop and Velkoff, contributes to low female employment. Consequently, as Mishra points out, 'the chances of a young woman, especially from a poor rural background, finding a good job' are extremely slight (Mishra, 2005: 178). Thus, when employment opportunities, which 'occupies [more or less] a central place in parents' mind when considering the benefits of education', are very limited parents prefer not to send their girls to school beyond a particular level (Pandey, 2004: 89). One of my male respondents thus said, 'Jobs for girls are very difficult now-a-days. If they are not getting a job then what is the use? This is the main problem' (Kalu). Another interviewee said, 'Some of them are doing jobs but then how many of them are able to do that? Women have to be at home only' (Mangu).

In a situation of job shortages, women are more likely to be engaged in waged work which includes agricultural labour such as harvesting crops, gathering wood, or doing domestic work. The account of one of the mothers in my research highlighted this:

> Where are the jobs now-a-days? Even the boys are not getting them. They [boys] are struggling to get a job, so … how will girls get a job? They have to work in the field, you know, so what will the girls do with more study? (Moti)

She questioned the appropriateness of girls acquiring more education when they ultimately had to work in the field. Whilst so doing, she revealed the fact that girls are expected to take up work in the agricultural sector to pave the way for boys, the superior

sex, to secure a 'job'. The World Bank Report (The World Bank, 1991) also confirms this fact. According to the report, 90 percent of working women are involved in the informal sectors.[39]

Ramachandran examined the scarcity of job opportunities in India in general and its implication in particular for parents. She found that:

> The presence of a group of demoralised/disillusioned youngsters, who may have either completed primary schooling or dropped out, who are underemployed or have no employment or productive work, act[s] as a disincentive for education of other children in the family/community. (Ramachandran, 1999 quoted in 2001b: 3)

Such lack of employment opportunities, as indicated, featured in my interviewees' responses. As one of the fathers said, 'I thought she is not going to do any job, where is there a job for her these days? So, what is the need?' (Kalu) In one of my focus groups, community members also said: 'Now-a-days jobs are not available, so what is the use of study [for girls]? Boys, those who have passed higher classes also have not got any jobs, how will the girls get them?' 'Yes, from our village no girl has gone for a job, even boys are not getting jobs, so why send girls to study?' (Focus group in the first village)

The non-availability of jobs in their area discouraged the parents from sending their daughters to school while the same did not hold true in the case of the boys. For boys they still had the hope that they would get some sort of job, or that they could establish themselves by taking up a business. Moti said, 'Umm, boys have to get a job, some job, when they finish their study. They have to do something, take up a job or start a business. That is the only hope we have.' This reflects that boys are automatically considered to need the skills of education more than girls do. Thus there is 'often a powerful economic and social rationale for investing in the education of sons rather than daughters' (Mishra, 2005: 178). Boys, considered the future breadwinners of the family in the Indian context, supposedly need more education than girls. Mangu, one of the fathers in my sample confirmed it: 'They [boys] are the breadwinners of the house, they have the prime responsibility of the house, I mean, to meet everyone's requirements'.

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[39]The informal sector includes jobs such as domestic servant, field labourer on a family farm, or non-agricultural labourer. Most of these are unskilled and low paid jobs.

However, it is equally important to emphasize here that the decisions of the parents with regard to schooling are 'multidimensional' (Mishra, 2005: 179). Their preference changed based on the realities of the labour market, i.e. the availability or otherwise of jobs and the extent to which girls can 'translate their credentials into opportunities for work' (Pandey, 2004: 88). This was evident in Kalu's response:

> There should be some job available, some small job, however small it may be but it should be available. Then we will send them to school, everything I will do to send her, I will do daily labour, borrow money from somewhere, pay the fee, buy books, everything I will do if there is a job available.

He reaffirmed, when I enquired if there was a chance of getting a job, that he would allow his daughter to study, and said, 'Oh yeah, definitely I will make her study. If there is guarantee of a job then I will certainly allow her to study' (Kalu).

Although my interviewees were mostly sceptical about the employment opportunities for girls which they cited as one of the reasons for girls' non-participation in school education, they all showed what Pandey points out, that 'community norms prove highly resistant to change, especially if modifying them has a direct effect on family life, as changes in gender roles are apt to do' (2004: 88). My participants did not condone the formal employment of girls. At the same time they indicated that there were no jobs available. The general notion that prevailed in the community was that, sending girls to school was not very important as they did not have to go out and do a job in the formal sector, and when boys were not getting jobs, who would take on girls? This indicates the secondary position of girls and women in society where their chances of availing themselves of basic life opportunities are dependent on the opportunities available to the male. Thus, when the links between education and employment are perceived to be very weak the option available to girls is petty menial work which does not require much education.

Facilities and incentives in school – do they make any difference?

Several incentive schemes were in operation in the state mainly with the objective to motivate parents and compensate for some of the costs of sending girls to school. The issue of incentives has been part of the debate among policy makers in India in ensuring access to education. Ramachandran, Mehrotra and Jandhyala observe that:

> Right up to the mid-1990s a welfarist approach dominated the development and educational arena. It was believed that the situation can be turned around through providing monetary and other benefits to poor children and their families or through targeted incentives in the form of uniforms, school supplies and mid-day meals. The assumption was that the problem lies in the abject poverty of families and that providing relief or support could enable them to pull themselves or their children out of a difficult situation. There was also an unspoken belief that the problem is with the 'people' and not the system. (2007: 1)

The gender and equity strategies of the DPEP and the recent SSA include the improvement of school infrastructures and the provision of toilets. It was assumed that improving the school infrastructure might lead to enhanced enrolment and the retention of children in school. The most common incentives provided to students are free textbooks, free uniforms for girls, mid-day meals and attendance scholarships for girls. Though my interviewees acknowledged the importance of incentives in attracting children to school, the fact that their daughters or some of their daughters were out of school showed that they were not very strongly motivated by these schemes. The incentives provided by the school were not robust enough to effect a noticeable change in their motivation to send girls in particular to school. Rather, incentives were theoretically encouraging and helped parents to enrol their sons. The accounts of the parents showed this. Most of them acknowledged that incentives such as uniforms, textbooks and mid-day meals were provided by the school in their village. However, they were neither very enthusiastic about these incentives available to girls nor were they expecting anything else to be done by the government to encourage girls' participation in education. To my enquiry about whether any additional facilities would help their daughters to go to school, one of the fathers replied: 'Nuh … facilities are there, what else is required?' (Mansingh) Likewise another father said, 'No, all the facilities are there already' (Kamal). Only two of the parents out of the total 24 demanded notebooks, pens and pencils to be provided by the school to the girls. This indicates that on the whole the parents did not make strong links between these incentives and sending their daughters to school.

Additionally, some parents wanted more incentives for their sons. When I asked them to categorise any other facilities that would help them send their daughters to school, Bapulal said, 'If they are giving notebooks, then it is good. They should give the uniforms to the boys also, why are the boys not given them? What have they done?' Another mother too held the view that boys should be given uniforms by the school whereas regarding girls she could not think of anything. She said:

> Devli: They should give clothes to the boys.
> Q: Right, but I was asking about girls. Do you wish to have some more facilities so that your daughters could go to school?
> Devli: What is required for girls? …

She too talked about boys when I asked what more should be done for girls. Apparently, the parents were more interested in the facilities for their sons than their daughters as the education of daughters was not their priority compared to that of their sons.

However a few of the interviewees raised the issue of the management and delay in the distribution of incentives. For example, one of the mothers reported that by 10th July her children who were in school which has started on 1st July had still not received textbooks. She further added that her children did not go to school immediately when the school year started as there was no teaching in the school due to the absence of textbooks. To my question whether her children had got their new books, she said:

> Maina: No, not now, the school has opened only now, yesterday or the day before.
> Q: When will they get the books?
> Maina: Who knows?

The delay in the distribution of the textbooks, considered to be crucial for teaching-learning, was irrespective of the fact that the state claims to have developed a water-tight calendar for their timely distribution. According to the annual plan of the state, a day-to-day calendar has been developed to ensure the proper distribution and monitoring of free textbooks by the state office and was communicated to district collectors[40] well in advance of the new school year, in the month of May. The calendar outlines the activities, roles and responsibilities of the functionaries at each level. It also includes instructions and activities related to the day-to-day monitoring of the timely distribution of books and targets to reach the children enrolled in schools on 1st July, the first day of the school

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[40] The Collector is the highest officer in the district from the point of view of administration who has utmost power over all the government departments at district level. He also controls, coordinates and monitors the functioning of all the government departments.

opening (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2008a: 35). But this calendar was evidently not fully implemented.

The parents I interviewed also raised their concern regarding the management of the mid-day meal scheme in the school. One of the fathers commented:

> Q: Do the children who are in school get a mid-day meal every day?
> Kamal: No, not every day? They get it, but some days they do not.
> Q: Why?
> Kamal: Who knows the details? Sometimes the provisions, I mean, wheat, lentil, oil, all that, are not there and sometimes the cook is not there. It goes on like this. I … just said what I have seen.

The mid-day meal is one of the most ambitious schemes financed by the central government and has been available nationally since 1995 – 1996. Initially, in Madhya Pradesh food grains[41] were distributed to the students under the programme. Based on their attendance[42] each student was given three kilograms of grains per month. In 2001, the scheme was revised and cooked meals were introduced in schools as a result of the Right to Food Campaign[43]. Under the revised scheme children are given hot meals that include rice/*roti*, lentils and vegetables in school.

A study conducted in 2007 by National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) revealed:

> School enrolment indicated marked improvement in enrolment pattern of children in primary school. Mid Day Meal scheme undoubtedly resulted in increased school attendance and facilitated the retention of children in school for a longer period. The scheme has played a crucial role in reducing drop out, especially among girls. Parents viewed that the mid day meal had reduced the burden of providing one time meal to their children and considered it as a great support to their families. Teachers opined that mid day meal aided in active learning of children, which indirectly improved their academic performance. The scheme has played a significant role in bringing social equity. (2007: 6; English as in original)

However, a closer look at the scheme indicates severe malfunctions in the distribution of the cooked meals, especially in remote village areas. While monitoring schools on several occasions during my tenure in the education department of the government, I found

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[41]Students were provided with wheat or rice based on the preference prevalent in the area.

[42]80 percent attendance per month was made desirable for a student to qualify for food grains.

[43]The interim order of the Supreme Court in the year 2001 directed the government to start "providing every child in every government and government assisted primary schools with a prepared mid day meal […] each day of school for a minimum of 200 days." (Khera, n. d.: n. p.) At http://www.sccommissioners.org/pdfs/articles/righttofood.pdf.

schools not distributing mid-day meals for several days in a row. Among the reasons for this were a delay in receiving grains and/or funds, the absence of the cook and the absence of the teacher (the concerned teacher or the teacher in-charge in case of more teachers in a school). Most of the schools were in the habit of distributing only rice/*roti* and lentils or rice/*roti* and vegetables though they were provided with funds to include rice/*roti*, lentils and vegetables every day. Not providing one item on a daily basis saves money and thereby constitutes a misappropriation of funds. Jha and Jhingran[44] (2005) also reported delay and corruption in the distribution of the mid-day meal programme in their study that included Madhya Pradesh.

> The nationwide norm requiring 80 percent attendance in a particular month to be eligible for food grains is not followed anywhere. […] [S]ome teachers reduce the amount of food grains in proportion to the actual attendance. […] Several parents at different places complained about receiving much less than the norm. (2005: 74)

Moreover, contrary to the findings of the NIPCCD report, the teachers in my research considered the mid-day meal scheme an extra burden on them which reduced their time for teaching as they had to attend to the management of the mid-day meals. One teacher reported that:

> The mid-day meal programme is very good but we teachers have a lot of problems in managing that. It takes a lot of time, makes the place dirty, there is no cleaning staff for that. It is a real headache for us. From the children's point of view it is good but we have to face a lot of problems due to this. (Ramesh)

With effect from 1st July 2007, after the schools reopened, local self-help groups (SHGs) were involved and were given the responsibility of distributing mid-day meals to free teachers to concentrate on teaching. In this way, the entire job of cooking and management was outsourced to SHGs. Though the teachers in my cohort felt relaxed about the introduction of this, they still complained that they had to devote time to coordinating the local SHGs and supervising the distribution.

The distribution of free uniforms to girls enrolled in classes one to eight was introduced in 2003-04 to encourage girls' participation in school. Until 2007-08 girls were provided with a free uniform and the fund allocation for this was Rs. 90 (approximately 1.12 GBP) which was revised and from 2008-09 every girl was provided with two sets of uniforms at

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[44]The fieldwork of this study was conducted during the first half of 2001, prior to the implementation of cooked meals in schools.

the rate of Rs. 100 each. In contradiction to Mehrotra's suggestion that 'uniforms should cease to be mandatory for all children in all government and government-aided schools' (2006: 275), the parents of my cohort and especially the teachers and administrators were of the opinion that uniforms had been useful in attracting girls to school. However, the parents who decided to withdraw or not send their daughters to school at all were not much attracted by the uniforms distributed to the girls in school. Rather, some of them demanded the same to be distributed to their sons as indicated above.

The state of affairs regarding the distribution of the attendance scholarship which targets girls belonging to the SC and the ST category was also not very encouraging. The parents in two villages were not even aware of the provision of scholarships to enrolled girls. The general responses I got to my question whether the girls enrolled in school were provided with scholarships was:

> Nuh … no, money is not given. (Sugna)
> Nuh, no money, children get only books, clothes and lunch. (Bapulal)
> I think no, or some maybe are getting it, we don't know. (Partu)

My first interviewee had asked me, 'What is that'? when I enquired about the scholarship. He could not understand the term *chhatrabriti* (scholarship). On my explanation of the term he said, 'I don't think so, I think children are given only books and food, no money, you know' (Bhima). However, a few parents did mention that the girls got a scholarship.

The responses regarding the scholarship raised questions regarding its coverage as well as its implementation. The incentive offered in the form of cash, a meagre amount of only Rs. 100 per child per month, was not enough to constitute a noticeable share in the parents' income. It was too low to be effective. Second, the delays in delivery of this incentive and, indeed, its non-delivery in many instances defeated the whole purpose. For example, the purpose of the distribution of the scholarship is to motivate parents to support the regular attendance of their daughters by providing monetary support at the end of the month. But instead of a monthly payment the scholarship is often paid as a lump sum after six months or at the end of the year. As such it loses its meaning and relevance for parents who live on a subsistence wage from day to day. The fact that families in these remote villages live on the poverty line and most of them belong to the below the poverty line category, leaves them with little option for future planning. Small

amounts of money that are delivered at great intervals mean little in a hand-to-mouth existence.

Among the school facilities the issue that ran through all the three villages was the issue of toilets. The availability of toilets, heralded by the government as one means to reduce absenteeism, was perceived as unimportant by the parents, at least at the primary stage. Indeed, toilets, the common toilets that were available in the schools, were mostly found to be locked as their maintenance and cleanliness were problematic due to the scarcity of water. On the other hand, the availability of drinking water was an important issue – in two out of the three villages there was no drinking water facility in the school. The children had to fetch water from the hand pump in the village that was situated half a kilometre away from the school in the first village and around a kilometre away in the second village. The problem of drinking water becomes acute in the summer when the hand pumps dry out and this was pointed out by all the parents.

On the whole, whilst the teachers and the administrators stressed the important role played by the incentives provided by the government in motivating parents to send their daughters to school, the parents on the contrary did not seem very enthusiastic regarding the incentives that were on offer to them. Government officials of course have the tendency to defend the schemes of the government, maybe because first, they are part of it; second, because they get benefits out of the schemes by way of corruption; third, they fail to look at the issue critically and from the point of view of the parents and girls, the beneficiaries, for whom the schemes are meant. The parents, on the other hand, do not consider the incentives and facilities provided in the schools much when deciding whether their daughter would participate in the school as the incentives are too low to be effective in this regard. It seems that 'incentives alone cannot build a long-term commitment to schooling and [thus], it is necessary to combine this with other [effective] measures' (Jha and Jhingran, 2005: 303).

Girls' educational participation and the role of the teachers

The school in village-2 had only one teacher in place whereas in the other two villages there were two teachers. All the teachers in the sample villages were male and had gone up to class 12 as their own qualification. Two of the teachers, one each in village-1 and village-3, came from the block head quarter whereas the other three teachers were local

residents. In village-1 the teacher who was a local had his house in the main village rather than in the hamlet itself, likewise the local teacher in village-3 was a resident of the adjacent village. None of the schools in the sample villages had non-teaching staff. The number of teachers in school, their positioning and their relation with the community they served played an important role in keeping the girls in school and below I focus on this.

The role of the teacher is pivotal in the entire schooling process. Once in school, whether and how long girls will continue their study also depends on their experiences in school. An effective teacher can make each moment a student spends in school meaningful. On the other hand, a passive, poorly motivated and disinterested teacher can make the schooling experience of girls boring, not meaningful and threatening. The role and behaviour of teachers in promoting girls' education has been highlighted by many researchers (Jha and Jhingran, 2005; Nambissan, 2004 and Ramachandran and Saihjee, 2002) who believe that availability of a school closer to the habitation alone may not ensure all children's participation in school (Aggarwal, 2000). Teachers in rural schools in India often run a school single-handedly, that is, there is one teacher for the whole school. His job, for most teachers are male, includes: opening the school, teaching all the five classes, distributing incentives such as textbooks, uniforms, mid-day meals etc., keeping records of the distribution of incentives, surveying the community to assess the status of out-of-school children, preparing the annual education plan of the village and providing other key administrative information. At the same time, such teachers usually come from the same locality. They mostly belong to families of the higher caste or class in comparison to the rest of the villagers. These teachers themselves therefore have a) limited education, mostly up to class 12 as in my sample, b) economic interests such as their fields outside the school to work on, and c) are in a social position of relative autonomy in relation to the villagers and therefore are unassailable by the parents.

According to Jha and Jhingran, the opening on time and the general functioning of schools is a crucial factor. They argue that it is:

> critical in sustaining [the] interest [of girls], leading to [their] continuation […] in school. In fact, [proper] functioning [of the school] and processes have the capacity to work as a countervailing force to the constraints created by social and family situations. […] The experiences at school in terms of teachers' attitudes are [therefore] critical, [especially for girls] coming from socially and economically marginalised backgrounds. Positive and encouraging experiences help in building confidence in [girls, at the same

time, it also] inspires parents to continue schooling [for their daughters]. […] teachers' attitudes to parents [is also important in this respect]. The impression of uneducated and poor parents about school functioning is synonymous with their impression of teachers. (2005: 294)

I examined this factor by asking the parents in my sample about their views of the teacher and the functioning of the school in their village. Regarding the functioning of the school and opening on time, the parents in two out of the three villages expressed their dissatisfaction. One mother said, 'Some days it opens on time, some days late, no fixed things' (Maina). Another mother also said, 'Sometimes the teacher comes late, the children go and play, fight there, nobody to see' (Chanda). One father from the same village said, 'Opens but … not always on time' (Partu).

Other than the opening of the school on time, the parents also complained about the erratic presence of the teachers in the school. According to the parents, coming late, going early and remaining absent on some days were common practices amongst the teachers. The mother in village-2 said, 'The teacher also remains absent many days' (Maina). A father in the first village talked about this issue and said, 'The teacher comes sometimes late and goes early, but that is ok, he must be having work sometimes' (Choksingh). Another father in the same village also expressed his dissatisfaction regarding the teacher in the school when he said:

> Yeah, opening, sometimes late, sometimes the teachers go here and there so the school remains closed. Sometimes children get a half-time holiday. (Bhima)

This father not only pointed out the erratic opening of the school but also highlighted the fact that as the teachers had the practice of leaving the school during class hours the children were at a loss as they had to go back home in the middle of the school day. Another father in the same village reiterated the point made by others when he said:

> The teachers come late ... whenever they want. Two teachers are there but one of them is always absent, if they are not coming then the school is closed, nobody to see. (Mangu)

On my enquiry regarding where exactly the teachers went, why they came late and so on, the parents expressed their inability to explain this. As one of them said: 'Who knows, we are illiterate people, you know' (Bhima). Maina, the mother who mentioned that the teacher remained absent, also expressed a lack of knowledge about the matter, and said: 'Who knows? He must be going somewhere, I don't know'. There are thus serious issues

regarding the effective running of the village schools. Since the teachers' behaviour was clearly, and from the parents' perspective inexplicably, erratic, there was little incentive for the parents to send those children about whose schooling they in any event felt ambivalent, to school. The villagers did not see themselves in a position to question the teachers directly because they found themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Indian society, especially in villages, is highly hierarchical. As in the case in my sample, out of the total five teachers four belonged to the local communities and had higher social status than most of the members of the community that they served. The higher social positioning of teachers silenced the villagers up to a certain extent. This factor was also highlighted by Jha and Jhingran (2005) who found in another district of Madhya Pradesh the teacher of an EGS school who was from a dominant community opened the school only for a couple of hours. Jha and Jhingran pointed out that '[the community] neither have the same concept of time to monitor the number of hours nor the courage to question the teacher' (2005: 158). But this power imbalance, in the case of my research, had not stopped the members of the community from evaluating the behaviour of the teacher and questioning it in their mind, though they did not feel comfortable talking about it. Some recognized, however, that it impacted on what was taught at school. As one mother of five children said, 'These days there is no study in the school, that is why these children are not going' (Maina).

She was referring to her youngest two children who were enrolled in school and were at home on the day of my visit. Their mother gave a valid reason for this – there was no teaching in the school. A father in the first village also questioned the teaching-learning atmosphere in the school.

> Mangu: School is ok, but … you know …
> Q: Yes? What is it?
> Mangu: I mean the teaching is not ok, you always find the children shouting and playing, no teaching.

Another villager also raised the issue of 'no teaching' in the school. This father of three daughters and one son who had stopped his ten-year old daughter attending school two years previously but sent his son to a private school said:

> Nanalal: There is no proper teaching in the government schools. Children simply go and come, they only sit there, no teaching at all, they enjoy the life there, both teachers and students. Teachers do not come regularly, whenever

they feel like it they come, it is completely mismanaged, why should I put my child there, simply to go and come?

Q: Was he [your son] in the private school from the beginning?

Nanalal: No, there was no private school in the village initially so he was in the government school, then I put him in the private one.

Q: But I heard that in the government school they provide books for free, there is no tuition fee and the mid-day meal also is provided there.

Nanalal: Yeah, all these are there but I don't like the government schools, they do not teach there, teachers do not come, they come at their wish and go at their own wish, they do not bother whether the children are learning or not. They are only bothered about drawing their salary. But here, in the private school, the teacher comes regularly, the school opens regularly and on time, she [the teacher] teaches the class without fail.

This father turned to a private, fee-charging school as he found sending children to the government school was fruitless owing to its poor quality and/or the absence of any instruction there. This has been highlighted by Dreze and Kingdon (2001) who found parents complaining about low teaching standard in their local government school in rural India. Dreze and Sen (1995) argue that parents tend to send their sons to private schools if the village school fail to meet their expectations. Thus the free education offered by government schools is no longer a significant attraction as highlighted in the DPEP report (2000 in Ramachandran and Saihjee, 2002: 1604). The issue of the quality of such free education is a concern that needs to be addressed seeing that quality of teaching is more important for girls participation in education (Kambhampati and Rajan, 2005; Kane, 2004). As one father said:

Balu: Yeah, the school is there but no teaching here, no proper teaching at all.

Q: What do you mean?

Balu: No teaching at all in the school, the teacher never turns up, why should I send the children there? I will send them to the nearby village, there is a *Saraswati Shishu Mandir* [a private school] there.

This father of three children had withdrawn two of his daughters from school because he thought his daughters were not learning anything. Another father in the same village lamented the learning level of his children who were in class three and class five, and said:

Not learning much, Shyama went up to class three but cannot read a book. Maya also not very smart, only knows the alphabet and numbers. Mohan can read a book but is very slow in that, I don't know what they are doing. (Mansingh)

Balu was the only respondent (father) in my cohort who spoke openly and emphatically against the teacher as the following extract from his interview shows:

> Q: Are you sure the teacher never comes?
> Balu: Yeah, he comes, opens the school and after some time goes away.
> Q: Where does he go? And who takes care of the children in his absence?
> Balu: Children are at the care of God only, nobody else.
> Q: Where does the teacher go?
> Balu: He goes to his house, comes in between, goes again and comes only to close the school, now you tell me, in this condition what will the children learn?
> Q: Have you ever talked to the teacher in this regard?
> Balu: I don't talk to him now-a-days, he has no manners, he does not know how to speak.

This father was furious about the behaviour of the teacher. According to him, the teacher who belonged to an upper-caste family did not respect the villagers, neglected his duties and was not even physically present in the school at all times. The teacher took advantage of his upper-caste status and being the son of the *patel* (head of the village) and did not bother about the children in the school.

Unlike this father, most of the parents in my research were incapable of questioning the behaviour of the teacher. They found themselves helpless to ask the teacher or even talk to him regarding the day-to-day functioning of the school. One of the fathers, who expressed his dissatisfaction regarding the opening of the school and teaching-learning in the school, articulated his inability to discuss the matter with the teacher:

> Q: Have you talked to the teacher regarding this any time? Have you tried at all from your side?
> Mangu: What will we try? How can we do that? It is the school of the government, how can we say anything?

Evidently the parents felt powerless to intervene in matters of the school. They became silent observers and thought they had no power to talk to the teacher regarding school affairs as the teacher was the employee of the government and the school belongs to the government. In addition, the higher social status of the teacher prevented the villagers from monitoring his performance in the school. As one of the fathers said, 'How can we say something to him [the teacher]? They are big fellows, it is better not to have enmity with them' (Bapulal). Though the system of the *Patel* as head of the village has long been abolished and they have no legal or administrative power over villagers, they still enjoy the social power bestowed upon them informally by the villagers. In addition they also hold economic power over the villagers by lending them money which creates economic dependency between the villagers and the *Patel*, and serves to silence the villagers. This particular father confirmed this when I asked whether the *Patel* lent money to people:

'Yeah, he does, where else will we go?' He confirmed that he himself had borrowed money from the *Patel* for the marriage of his daughter, 'Yeah, … I have, for the marriage of my older daughter'. Villagers are more likely to go to money lenders than to the bank at times of need. As the villagers depend on the *Patel* family they tend to ignore it if the teacher does not perform his duties well, especially when the teacher, as was the case, is related to the *Patel*.

Contrary to the responses of the fathers who either expressed their satisfaction (five) or discontent regarding the teacher and the school, the mothers were mostly unaware of the teaching-learning process in the school.

> No, I do not know. (Devli, Moti)
> Teaching, I don't know, these boys are going but I never saw them reading, don't know what they study there. (Kamli)
> Teaching, you are asking me about teaching. I don't know, the children should tell. (Sugna)
> What do I know? Children are going, they must be studying. (Bhuri)

Some of the parents in my sample felt that the teaching-learning in the school was the domain of the teacher and that they had nothing to do with that. Even one of the fathers said, 'What can I say about teaching? The teacher comes, it is his responsibility' (Bapulal). On my enquiry about whether the children were learning anything, he said, 'I am illiterate, what can I tell you? You have to ask the teacher' (Bapulal).

The inability of mothers to talk about the school and the teaching-learning process indicates that due to their own illiteracy the women tended to be alienated from the school and issues related to it. Further, due to their focus on the home and their family, the women had less time and interest in matters outside their home and family, and were thus less aware of issues pertaining to the school. Their unawareness of the functioning of the school and matters concerning it also indicates these women's lack of participation in the public sphere. Thus the usual answer they gave was, 'I do not know'. This is not only indicative of the circumscribed existence illiterate village women lead, but also indicates the need for significant awareness-raising and education among women to draw them at least into certain aspects of the public sphere such as education.

The regular functioning of school for the prescribed hours is the first requirement for an interest in schooling by the villagers. The existing scenario in terms of school functioning

in the villages I studied was far from satisfactory. In general, the schools in these villages opened late, closed early, functioned for fewer than the prescribed hours or on some days remained closed altogether. In this respect little appears to have changed since the government of India report (1988) commented that 'what was still more shocking was that a number of schools, especially in the tribal areas, had remained closed for certain periods of time and in a number of cases these schools had not functioned since the beginning of the academic year' (Government of India, 1988: 300).

As Sudarshan observes, 'there is a general perception that there has been an erosion of the ethic of service among teachers' (2000: 64). This assumes that an ethics of service amongst teachers used to exist. However, my data do not suggest this. Rather, they show that the teachers themselves have limited education, are over-burdened by multiple level teaching tasks, do not treat teaching as a profession but as an additional source of income to other sources such as their fields, are unsupervised, unaccountable, and unassailable by parents due to their social status. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the actual enrolment and retention rates of pupils, both male and female, remain low. To do away with the teacher coming from outside who attends school in terms of the timing of the available public transportation to the village, the government introduced the concept of local teachers in 1997 when it started an innovative alternative schooling programme called the EGS. The teachers in EGS are the para-teachers and are recruited locally[45] by the *Panchayat* at the block level. The philosophy behind this new arrangement was to ensure the availability of the teacher at the school for the entire school period, the regular opening of schools and a functional school to guarantee the quality of the provision. However, as the responses of the parents in my cohort indicate, the teacher being local did not ensure his/her availability in school throughout the school period. Neither did it guarantee the running of the school for the prescribed time. The lack of accountability of the teachers manifested in teacher absenteeism leads to parents becoming disillusioned with the school system. Furthermore, in the absence of an obvious pressure for minimal performance from the villagers who find themselves either powerless or lacking in relevant knowledge, the school does not function as a responsible institution, accountable for the learning of the children. The schooling of girls requires a particularly sensitive and responsible functioning to break the barriers created by their social and gender

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[45]Para teachers were recruited either from the concerned village or from the adjacent village in case of the non-availability of a qualified person for the post from the same village but belonging to the same *Gram Panchayat*, a political division that consists of a cluster of villages.

positioning and the economic disadvantage of their families. This was manifestly absent here.

The single-teacher school is a common phenomenon in remote rural areas in India. The presence of a single teacher or even just two teachers in a school is of concern, as when one or two teachers teach five classes together the result is often an extremely poor quality of instruction. This was pointed out by Nambissan who argues, 'Handling more than one class calls for pedagogic skills in which teachers are rarely trained. Hence little or no learning takes place in the classroom and teachers are concerned mainly with controlling diverse groups of children rather than communicating lessons effectively to them' (Nambissan, 1997 in Nambissan, 2000: 191). Single-teacher schools mean that 'multi-grade teaching becomes necessary', and with an indifferent attitude from teachers towards teaching and an uncaring approach to the social and economic hardship faced by girl students from poor and vulnerable families, 'the school simply become[s] [a] "detention centre" for children for the duration of the school day' (Sudarshan, 2000: 64).

Conclusions

My data reveal that the physical availability of schools and their easy access does not ensure that all girls attend school. Less than half of the parents (ten out of 24) I interviewed appeared to be satisfied with the functioning of the school in their own village. Their satisfaction tended to refer to the mere existence of the school, the infrastructure, that is, the building and the facilities such as textbooks and the mid-day meal provided in the school and not its academic milieu. Most of the parents were illiterate and therefore had little or no sense of what one might expect from a school. Some of the parents were therefore not aware or were indifferent towards what was going on in the school. But a small number were actively dissatisfied with the academic atmosphere of the school. This was reflected in their responses. Parents may seem, as observed by Rampal, 'less dissatisfied with the quality of provision' in a school, as 'satisfaction is clearly a relative notion and is crucially linked to expectations and aspirations' (2004: n. p.). She argues, 'parents may have good reasons to be satisfied with a school' with closer proximity to their home and where the teacher is relatively regular 'irrespective of what goes on in the name of teaching and, more crucially, of the quality of learning' (Rampal, 2004: n. p.).

Although parents were not very much aware of what their children were studying or learning, they all, except a few, attached high value to education. Parents, though most were illiterate themselves, perceived education as a means to achieve a life which offers better opportunities. For them, especially mothers, education could bring better social positioning for their daughters. A few years of schooling, as these women in rural areas perceived, could place the girls in a better social position than they themselves had been in. They aspired to a life for their daughters that meant not being ill-treated by her spouse or in-laws due to being 'illiterate' or 'not knowing' anything. Their desire for a better social positioning for their daughters revealed that they recognised the subordinate position they had in the family and in society because of their gender.

Other than fighting against the evil of 'illiteracy', for parents, education was also an instrument for enabling girls to be in a better position in negotiating the public sphere, e.g. in terms of transport and business interactions with others. My interviewees, especially girls, highlighted the fact that girls need to be liberated from the burden of dependency in terms of reading and writing. For girls, maintaining a relation with the biological family through letters after marriage was possible if they could read and write. Through education they could remain connected to their parents and at the same time could retain their privacy.

Parents dreamt of a better life for their children, especially sons who could, if educated, get a job and thereby a secure earning. For them securing a job or getting employed was vital for their sons as they were considered as the main breadwinners of the family. All the parents in my sample valued the importance of a paid job in the life of their sons, whereas in the case of the girls, the parents were not very sure about getting a job, perceiving instead a gloomy picture of the present job market. Though all the women and the girls, except one girl and a woman in my sample were engaged in wage earning activities and thereby were adding to the family earning, still the elder male members of the family were regarded as the breadwinners. Despite the fact that parents valued the education of girls at a theoretical level, their views were contradicted by the perception that education had no impact on girls' future roles as wives and mothers, by the expectation that they do domestic labour and contribute to the household income through wage labour and also by the lack of employment opportunities in the area.

All the girls in my sample unanimously desired schooling for girls. Girls who had dropped out after a few years of schooling shared their good memories of school time and felt nostalgic about it. The girls who never had a chance to attend school wished to be in school. In total contradiction to the parents' views regarding the education of their daughters the girls in my sample perceived school from a different perspective. For them school was a place where they could be with their friends, play with them, laugh and talk. The desire to be with the peer group was very strong amongst the girls in my sample. Moreover, they wanted to be free from the burden of housework and the wage labour activities that they were engaged with. This indicated that they were forced to take up the responsibility of domestic labour and add to the family income. They were not in a position to express their desire for studying to their parents as they had almost no voice in the family. They accepted the decision of their parents regarding their lives, considering it their fate.

The girls were happy to be at school as it allowed them freedom from a burdensome life but their parents assessed the schooling of girls in cost terms. Their decision for inclusion or exclusion of girls in/from school was also dependent on the view they had of the teacher. Though parents in these rural villages evaluated the behaviour of the teacher, they were voiceless as they found themselves at the bottom of the social fabric that they live in. Teachers who generally belong to families with a higher social status took advantage of the voicelessness of the villagers by coming late to school, going early and sometimes even remaining absent from the school. Lack of commitment and interest of teachers in the school resulted into a dull and unexciting ambiance of the school which did not attract the parents much.

The widespread absence of a proper management of incentives, the unfulfilled expectation of a tangible outcome of education, and parents' gendered views of girls' education had a bearing on keeping girls out of school. These parental perceptions were based on the existing social relations and roles of men and women, and I look at these factors in the next chapter to understand the discrimination of girls and their exclusion from education.

Chapter 5
Feminine Socialization and Girls' Positioning within the Community

I focus my discussion, in this chapter, on the position of girls and women in society as articulated by my interviewees. I specifically look into their positioning between families, that is their biological family and the family of their in-laws. I also investigate existing traditions, socio-cultural practices and the role expectations regarding girls and women in the community and how individual community members negotiate their position to act in accordance with the set community norms. After analysing the fathers' position in the family as decision-makers the chapter goes on to explore the notion of stigma attached to community members not acting in line with community norms. I discuss the above mentioned issues in relation to girls' education as my prime focus and investigate their role in influencing the inclusion or exclusion of girls in school education. As in chapter 4, in this chapter too I draw predominantly upon the experiences and opinions of the out-of-school girls and their parents.

Girls' position in society
Where do they belong?
In the Indian context girls come to this earth with the tag '*parayadhan*', which literally means property of others. From their birth girls are considered to 'belong to some other family'. This belief was strongly embedded among all the parents in my sample irrespective of their class, caste, literacy status or their gender. This was clearly evident when a father of six sons and one daughter said, 'They consider girls as *parayadhan*' (property of others) (Choksingh). He was referring to the community at large when he said 'they'. When I asked his own opinion on this, he said:

> Q: Umm, people consider girls as *parayadhan*, yeah, and what do you think?
> Choksingh: Girls, yeah, they are here for a temporary period. They of course belong to their family. They have to get married and go to their house.

A similar view was put forth by another mother when she said: 'Girls you know, *parayadhan*, […]. They have to go to their house' (Mohni). As girls are destined to go to 'their house', that is the in-laws' house, they are not even considered part of their biological family. Instead, girls are from the very beginning treated as temporary members who do not belong to the biological family and are thus unwanted. Kalu made it clear that the biological family is not girls' actual home. He said:

Kalu: Yeah, […] we don't keep them, send them to their house. When they become grown up then we send them immediately to their house. We don't keep them here.
Q: Is this not their house?
Kalu: Nuh, this is not their house, no. That is only their house. Here they are there for a few years.

He referred to the biological family of girls as 'this house' and the in-laws' house as 'that house'. The notion that girls belong to some other house or family was very strong amongst the parents of my sample. In contrast, sons were considered as the future support system of the family. The fact that boys continue to live with their biological family after their marriage puts them in a different and more advantageous position than girls. Parents believed that it is the sons who will take care of them in their old age. Thus, Nanalal said this, regarding his expectation from his son who was studying in a private school, 'If he gets a job then his future will be secured, he will have no problem, we will also have no problem in our old age'. The last part of his statement that 'we will also have no problem in our old age' reflects the sentiment of parents who wants to invest in the education of their sons with the expectation that this investment will bring return for them in the future (Pal, 2004) even though this may not happen in reality. Two sets of parents I interviewed had the experience of being abandoned by their sons after the latter's marriage and once they had their own families. Rangji for example, said of two of his sons who were earning:

They [sons] are married and are with … their families, they are not … supporting us, they do not want to help me though they are earning … for us they are useless.

Rangji, the father of two sons and three daughters, had been suffering from TB for six years and had been hospitalised for a long period. Due to his ill health he was not able to continue his job as a waged labourer. As his sons who were earning by that time were not supporting him and his family, as is the norm in the Indian context, the daughters were engaged in waged labour to support the family. Although Rangji himself had had this bad experience he still felt strongly that boys are '*budhape ka sahara*', 'a stick to support their parents in their old age'. He said:

> Boys should take care of the parents. Not like my fellows … they should take care of the parents, be a support to them in their old age … what did we give them birth for? (Rangji)

Rangji believed that though his sons were not supporting him, this was not the case at large. He considered his sons exceptional cases and said, 'My boys are … useless … but otherwise they only take care of the family'. This was the collective understanding that prevailed in the community.

Do girls belong to the family of their husbands then, as claimed by their natal parents? In principle, yes, in the Indian context. An old adage prevalent in India goes like this: 'the life of a girl is like a paddy plant which does not belong to the place where it grows originally. It is transplanted at another place'. Just like the paddy plant, girls are also uprooted from their biological families and transplanted into their in-laws families. Though I did not have a chance to ask the opinion of the in-laws' families in this regard, the experience of two of my girl interviewees did throw some light on the matter. Madhu had an older sister who was ill treated, thrown out of the house and abandoned by her in-laws. She came back to her biological family after she was abandoned by her in-laws and was living with them when I interviewed Madhu. Madhu said of her sister, 'she is with us now. She came back from her in-laws, they are not keeping her'. She further mentioned, 'They were always beating her, I don't know why. Then they sent her here and are not ready to take her back'. Rekha's older sister had similar experiences in her in-laws' family. Rekha said:

> My sister's husband was beating her, he was not allowing her to come here [natal family] also, my sister was crying always but he was not allowing her to come here. He was always fighting with my sister. Then one day he sent her here and said that he does not want to take her back. I do not know what happened, he was not happy with my sister. My parents went there to talk but he did not listen to anybody. So my sister is with us now.

This undoubtedly indicates that though the actual place of a girl is considered to be the house of her husband, this does not necessarily assure her a permanent dwelling for the rest of her life. Her staying with her in-laws is dependent on factors such as how happy and satisfied the husband and the in-laws are with her and the capacity of the girl to adapt to the new family. However, the above instances show that girls are always in a vulnerable position. They can be thrown out of their in-laws' house at any point in their life. Thus it can be said that girls literally do not belong to any side – neither their biological family nor their in-laws'. The biological family is always eager to send the girls to their in-laws as

early as possible to get rid of their responsibilities whereas the in-laws family is mostly reluctant to accept them and provide an unconditional place in the family.

The perception that 'girls belong to some other family' and 'boys are the future support system' has serious repercussions for the schooling of the girls. It influences parents' decision regarding sending girls to school to a considerable extent. Thus, Kalu said, 'Who will take all these responsibilities? Once our girls are grown-up, get them married and send them to their house. That's it'. Rami also expressed the same view that prevails in the community regarding the education of grown-up girls:

> That is the time, you know … parents think about their [girls'] marriage, … sending them to the in-laws, … all that starts then, so everybody will be after that only, no time to study then. All are against their study at that time. Before they are grown up, whatever they study that much only they can do, not after that. It happens that way.

Thus, as girls are preordained to join their husband's family after marriage once they obtain puberty, educating them is perceived as something which will benefit some other family and not the biological parents themselves. This sentiment of the parents in my sample and the community at large is reflected in the wide-spread saying in South Asia that 'caring for a daughter is like watering the neighbours' tree; the fruits go to someone else' (Islam 1979 in Kabeer, 2003: n. p.). Mishra (2005: 179) too found in Mali that parents 'commonly regard girls' education as a "lost investment" because it is the future husband's family who reaps the returns, not them' (see also Raju, Atkins, Townsend, *et al*., 1999; Bhatty 1998; King and Hill 1993). This perception of parents which keeps the education of girls beyond class four or five restricted is also discussed in chapter 4. Parents wait for girls to grow up so that they can be sent to their own house immediately. This aspect was clear when Sugna said, '[…] they have to go to their house, … that is the first work. […] they have to go first as a priority'. The parental house is considered as a transit point for girls, where a few early years may be devoted to schooling if the family conditions permit it. But the majority of this period is of course devoted to preparing girls for their future lives as home makers.

Preparing girls to take up the future challenges in their in-laws' family preoccupies parents' mind, making school education for them secondary. Kaul (2001) observed the same trend among parents in her sample. She reports that parents 'preferred engaging their daughters in household work and preparing them for "marriage"' (2001: 160). Sugna used this as a justification for why it was important for girls to help their mothers at home and do the

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household chores. When I asked her whether somebody is always needed to help her out at home, she said:

> Nuh … I do, but when I am not there they have to do it, serving food to the brothers, taking care of the cattle, they … have to learn also. Otherwise everyone will say, the mother did not teach her anything. … I make them help so that they will learn, how will they manage later otherwise?

The fear that their daughters will not be accepted wholeheartedly by their in-laws or will be ill-treated if not well equipped to handle the household chores, made parents withdraw the girls from school. This fear was reflected in Mangu's statement:

> If they [girls] do not learn things properly, their in-laws will tell us that we did not teach any housework … you know, we will be blamed. It is very difficult to be the father of girls. Take care of them, do everything, if something goes wrong then we will be blamed, they [in-laws] will send the girl back to the parents' house.

Similar fears were also expressed by Sugna regarding the fate of a girl who is not perfect at household chores:

> If she does not learn the housework now, how will she manage in her in-laws' house? Will they keep her for long? They will always scold her and will blame me also. They will say, the mother did not teach her anything.

Girls are thus oriented towards their future life by the parents from the very beginning. They are made to realise at a very early age that they have to take up household responsibilities at their husband's house and so they need to be prepared for that. Seema said that girls are always reminded of this by their parents:

> They [parents] say, you learn the work in the house now, how will you manage in your in-laws' otherwise? Will they keep you if you do not do any work there? Learn now or else you will suffer in future.

Parents very consciously and explicitly reminded girls 'of the destiny assigned to them by the traditional principle of division' of labour (Bourdieu, 2001: 94). Sunita too had similar experiences. According to her, attending to housework and learning to do it was very important for girls. When I asked her why, she replied:

> Sunita: Mummy says, when you go somewhere else you will do all the work, so you should do it now and learn things.
> Q: What does she mean by 'you will go somewhere else'?
> Sunita: She says, 'you will go to your in-laws, so learn things, otherwise how will you manage their house?' […] My mother always says, you are a girl, you will go to the in-laws.

In case of failure to manage the household chores in the in-laws' house girls may be abused by their in-laws and their parents may be held responsible. None of the parents were prepared to face such a situation and so they thought girls should be geared up for their future role as home maker, which was considered as the only fate for girls, instead of investing in their education. Thus girls were withdrawn from school after class three or so to start preparing for their future life. Girls too, as was evident from Sunita's accounts, are made to internalise their future role as 'taking primary responsibility for caring for the family' and not to question this division of labour (Kabeer, 2003: n. p.).

Exploitation of girls for work in and around house

Crucial contribution to household chores

Along with preparing for their future life, girls also contribute their labour to their natal family. They were made to take up the domestic responsibilities of their mother as soon as they were considered big enough, normally at the age of eight to nine years. Girls in the households where I did interviews were engaged in activities such as cooking, fetching water, cleaning the house, washing clothes, taking care of the needs of other members of the family and taking care of the cattle. For example, Mansingh said about his daughter who had dropped out of school after class three, 'Ah … she cooks, makes *chapattis*, fills up water, gives food to the younger ones, takes the goats to the field …'. Sugna was rather harsh when she talked about why grown-up girls do not go to school:

> Yeah, what will they do? Then they have to marry and go to their house. If she is in school then who will do the work at home? Her sisters are also not there now so she has to help. Nobody is there in the house, I go for work in the morning, and her grandmother is too old to attend to all the work.

The evidence suggests that girls are made to take up household responsibilities as soon as they are considered capable of it. The patri-local system of marriage where girls join their in-laws after marriage, which means after attaining puberty, puts them in a disadvantageous position and constitutes one reason for their discrimination even by their own parents. For example, Suman, the only daughter of Choksingh, had to drop out of school at the age of seven to assist at home when all six of her brothers including two who were older than her enjoyed being in school. Choksingh said:

Choksingh: Uh, … her mother was not keeping well, so she had to be at home. […] Somebody is needed at home.
Q: But why did only Suman have to stop going to school, not the boys, two of them are older than her as you said?
Choksingh: I said you know, her mother was not keeping well, she cannot cook, cannot do any work, so Suman had to do all this, there was no other girl in the house, so who else would do?

Similarly in the household of Bansu, the youngest daughter was withdrawn from school at the age of nine to shoulder the household responsibilities that her older sister left behind when she went to her in-laws, whereas the schooling status of her older brother remained unaffected. Bansu said, 'Yeah, she is doing all the work in the house you know, that is why she is not able to come [to school]'. Regarding his sons he said, 'No, they do not. They are in school, they are also small. They don't do anything'. Here, the son who was older than his sister by three years was considered too small to assign any work to as reported by their father. This tells us that the gender role expectations of the parents were completely fixed and make them assign 'home-oriented tasks' to girls whilst freeing their sons, on whom they thought they would rely in their old age, from this 'domestic burden' (Karlekar, 2000: 90, see also UNICEF, n. d.). There is no conception that chores might be shared out equally between all household members.

The experiences of the girls in my sample revealed the extent to which they were exploited for work at the home front and the discriminating behaviour they underwent. Radha for example, said:

One should study but what to do, if we study then what shall we eat? I wanted to study, my parents allowed me to go till class two, then they said, 'what will you do by studying more? If you do not work, then who will do the work at home?'

She further mentioned the differential treatment that they received in the house:

Q: Do you think parents treat both boys and girls equally or is there any difference in their treatment?
Radha: Uhm, they do that, it is like that. They say, you are a girl, you will go to your in-laws. My mother says, will you earn and feed us? you will earn and feed your in-laws only, you will not give us anything. Regarding school they say what will you do if you pass the examination? Who will bring water, who will cook, who will clean the vessels, who will do the work if you go to school?
Q: Do your brothers do any work in the house?

Radha: They do not do any work, they do not even take a glass of water by themselves, we have to give them water, only then do they drink. They do not do their work, we have to do that for them, so what will they do for the house? Now also you see, I am carrying their clothes to wash, they never do all that.

Sunita too experienced such behaviour in her family. According to her it is the girls who do all the work in the family including personal work for their brothers.

Sunita: Boys, they do not do anything in the house. They are there only to order us to do their work, we have to do everything. They are boys, you know, so they do not do any housework, mother will not allow them to do so.
Q: Why so?
Sunita: They are boys you know, so they should not work, and when sisters are around they will never do any work, we have to do all the housework and their work too, I mean, serving them food and water, washing their clothes, making their bed, everything.

Sunita, who was made to serve her family and brother, questioned the pro-filial attitude of her parents and raised the issue of the differential treatment that girls get in the family even after taking care of the needs of every other member of the family. She said:

Who knows? What enmity they have with us, we do all the work but then they scold us for small-small things, they like boys. Girls are a burden to them, that's what they say. That is why we have to work, then only will we get to eat. That is why girls do not study.

Sunita's description was very revealing. It exposed the secondary and inferior position that girls have in the family and in society. They are made to serve the entire family from a very tender age and in return for their service they get ill-treatment in the name of being girls who will join their in-laws family and therefore not serve the biological family forever. Their vital contribution to the family gets overlooked and the demand for more contribution from them in the form of attending to household chores becomes ever increasing as they grow.

Acting as half-mother

Besides doing the household chores girls were also in charge of taking care of their younger siblings in the absence of their mothers. For instance, Bhima counted the activities that his daughter who had never been to school was engaged in before she went to her in-laws:

> Bhima: Sunita was taking care of the household work and Anita when we were away, we come late you know so she had to cook.
> Q: What else was she doing?
> Bhima: Everything, all the work.
> Q: Such as?
> Bhima: Getting water, washing clothes, serving food to brothers, taking care of the cattle, everything.

Girls are considered an easy replacement for their mothers to manage the work in and around the house and to take care of the younger siblings. Sugandh, a ten year old girl in my sample for example, had dropped out from school after just class one to take care of her younger sister. She said:

> Yes, after this girl [younger sister] came, my coming to school became irregular, then I stopped coming [to school], who would have taken care of her otherwise?

When I enquired about her other activities she further mentioned:

> Sugandh: I bring water, sweep and clean the house, bring firewood and take care of this girl.
> Q. What else do you do? Do you cook also?
> Sugandh: Uhm, I cook, I make *Roti*, curry, vegetables. Mummy also does cooking and I do it too.

Sugandh had to bring her younger sister with her during the interview, she remained with her throughout the interview process despite the fact that her mother was at home on that very day. This revealed that she was effectively solely responsible for taking care of her younger sister. Jha and Jhingran (2005) also found that girls were engaged in sibling care along with other household chores and contributed to the family's struggle for survival. As Karlekar observes, 'girls are viewed as the natural assistants to their mothers. It is not unusual to see girls […] carrying younger siblings on their hips' (2000: 89). The Education For All Global Monitoring Report also confirmed this finding, stating 'there is strong

gender segmentation in occupations […] girls specialize in domestic work, such as looking after siblings' (UNESCO, 2003: 122). This phenomenon is sometimes extended when girls of lower birth order get engaged in taking care of the children of their older siblings. In my sample for example, Bapulal's younger, ten-year old daughter went to his oldest daughter's in-laws' house to baby-sit her child. He said:

> Bapulal: The older one got married, she has a child now, so her sister went to her village to help her.
> Q: What is she doing there?
> Bapulal: Rena is taking care of the child (babysitting) when Kamli goes to work.

Rena had to discontinue her school after class three to baby-sit her older sister's child and thus to free her to go out for waged labour and contribute to the family income. Her father was satisfied with the fact that Rena was learning household chores including cooking while babysitting her older sister's child. He said:

> Yeah, what to do, her sister called her, her in-laws wanted somebody to help. She goes in the morning and comes in the evening only, she has to work, what will they eat otherwise? Rena is taking care of the child, it is ok, she is learning some work there. Here she was not doing anything, at least the girl is learning something, she has started cooking there also. Here, I tell you she would not have learnt all that because her older sister is doing it, so she roams around all the time.

This reflects the extent of girls' labour contribution to the family that was rampant in the community under study where girls are exploited to the maximum. They are made to work not only in their families or in their in-laws' families but wherever they are needed and their contribution is required. As in the case of Rena, her father had no regrets that his daughter had to stop going to school to shoulder the responsibilities of her sister's in-laws. He was rather happy that his daughter was learning the skills that she would need in the future. School education did not seem to be of any value to him when girls ultimately have to raise children and cook for their family. The secondary position that girls and women have in the family and in community was thus very evident. Girls are viewed as liabilities in a patri-local marriage system and are subjugated for their labour which in turn discourages girls' schooling.

Where money matters

Adding to the family income is not new for girls and women. Not only after marriage, but before girls contribute to their family financially from a very young age and this process starts in their biological family. Most of the out-of-school girls in my sample were engaged in waged labour and thereby supporting their family financially too. As girls join their in-laws' family after marriage, the biological parents want to exploit girls' stay in their house as much as possible. The girls are made to work in the house and go for wage earning. Girls start earning at an early stage of their life even when they are still considered small. For example, the daughter of Kalu who attended to the household chores started working as a waged labourer at the age of ten (eleven years old at the time of interview). Her father said, 'She does work … such as bringing water, cleaning the house, washing clothes, cooking, taking care of the brothers, taking out the cow dung, … all this, small works only. She is small now, she cannot do the heavy work.' Fetching water and washing clothes are not considered heavy work and should be entrusted to girls of Seema's age as viewed by her father. Further discussion with Kalu revealed that Seema was also engaged in daily labour along with the responsibility of the household work in the morning and in the evening. She was earning between Rs. 20 to Rs. 30 (less than £0.50) per day. He said:

> No, how will she go to school? In the day time she goes out for daily labour.
> She goes within the village only. She does agricultural work in the field. No,
> she does not go for construction work, she is small now so does the
> agriculture work in the village only.

Although Seema was considered small that did not free her from taking up the responsibilities of the house. She was considered old enough to pitch in to enhance the family income though her relatively younger status helped her to take up labour of a supposedly lower order in terms of its heaviness.

The contribution of the girls to the family income was acknowledged by every parent in my sample across caste, class or educational status. As soon as girls are considered physically capable of taking up waged labour, they are made to earn for the family along with managing the household chores. Sugna for example, said, 'we are poor villagers … we cannot afford to send them to school forever. We have to work to get our daily bread, girls have to help'.

Moti made clear the concept of small and big and its relation to the type of work a girl can be assigned. She gave as the reason why her daughter stopped going to school in class four:

> Moti: The girl became big, you know. … She is going for work now, when can she go to school? She does not have time for school now. … She has become big enough to work.
> Q: What sort of work do you mean? Is it working in the house or going out for daily labour?
> Moti: No, not housework, she was doing the housework when she was small also. She was doing all that along with going to school, but now she is big so she can go for the work outside, we are getting some money out of it.

Thus the financial contribution of girls to the family was highly regarded by parents. Even in Choksingh's family where he was working as a truck driver and had six sons, the only daughter he had was doing waged labour besides the entire housework. The parental attitude towards girls being engaged in labour was revealed when Mohni said about her daughter:

> Grown-up girls, you know. What will they do studying more than that? They have to work and contribute to the family earning. When the stomach is growing it demands more … so accordingly more has to be arranged to meet the needs. And then, they are not boys. They have to go to their house. So the days they are here, they can earn and contribute to the family. What would the parents, poor fellows, otherwise do?

Mohni's account indicated the opening of several dimensions when a girl grows up. Her statement reaffirmed the fact that girls do not belong to their biological families. As they are predestined to go to 'their house' they are made to work and contribute to the biological family till they go. They have to earn their keep and at the same time they also have the responsibility to arrange for the bread of other members. Their future outsider status prevents parents from investing in them through education. On the other hand, it also allows parents to exploit girls for their labour in and outside home to their maximum.

In contrast boys are not only allowed but they are forced to go to school as the period of schooling for boys is considered the preparation for a secure future for them as well as their parents. This aspect was reflected when parents said repeatedly 'we will also have no problem in our old age'. The aspiration for a secure and hassle free future especially in old age underlined parents' biased attitude towards their daughters. The irony is, in the run for

securing their own future, parents tended to favour their sons at the cost of their daughters. Girls were made to work from dawn to dusk so that their brothers could get enough food to eat, could go to school in preparation for a brighter future for them and their parents. This was quite clear when Kalu gave a very instant and categorical answer to my question whether he would send two of his sons for waged labour when they grew bit older:

> Kalu: No, no, they will not go. I will make them study, they will study up to class 10 or 12. If they do well in study then more than class 12 they will study, they will go to school.
> Q: Then why did Seema stop going to school?
> Kalu: We are unable to manage the expenditure, umm, expenditure is becoming high, she has to go for work too.

Seema had to work so that her brothers could go to school and continue their education. Seema in turn was made to understand that her labour and financial contribution was required for the survival of her family and she had to accept her fate as she was a girl.

Similar claims of financial poverty were cited by a few of the other parents as the reason for engaging girls in waged labour. Ratni, the mother of three girls for instance, said, 'If they do not work how shall we survive?' Mansingh in addition said, 'Kamli did not go [to school], but she is ok, she earns Rs. 70[46] per day. Ah … studying is good, they should study when they are small but after that they have to do the work … We cannot manage otherwise'. Jha and Jhingran (2005: 95) also found that 'for the majority of poor families in different parts of rural India, poverty is absolute and daily life a constant struggle to survive and cope. This inevitably has a bearing on the schooling of children'. Kaul's (2001) findings are also in line with those of Jha and Jhingran's. She observed poverty and low family income as the main reason which keeps children away from school. But contrary to the finding of Jha and Jhingran, and Kaul, and the initial claim made by the parents in my sample, the poor economic condition of the family did not seem to be the prime reason for the girls remaining out-of-school. Though parents claimed initially that unless their daughters go for waged labour their family would face financial problems, later during the

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[46]Rs. 70 was approximately a little less than one pound in September 2008.

discussion they contradicted themselves by denying the same. For instance, Mansingh who asserted that they could not manage without his daughter's financial contribution denied the same later by saying, 'no, not that, not that it cannot be managed at all without her contribution, but … if something is coming that is better, you know.

Bansu, whose daughter left school after class three and was engaged in waged labour to earn a meagre amount of Rs. 25 to Rs. 30 per day affirmed this. According to Bansu though there would be a little problem in the house if the daughter was not earning, it was under their control and they could manage. He said:

> No, what difference will it make? Not much. We can manage without her earning also, we managed till now, she has been earning since last year only.

Though parents think that up to certain extent they can manage without the earnings of their daughter, as evident from the narratives of both Mansingh and Bansu, they look forward to the earnings and do not want to forego the additional income that their daughter brings. It may be that parents, especially from the fathers' perspective, though were in need of the money that their daughters brought in but were not in a position to reveal this in interview to maintain their male status as breadwinners. Though they were in need of it, they felt the revelation would expose their inability to manage the house for which, as the main breadwinner, they were responsible. However, poverty as the only or main concern here is also contradicted by the fact that a father of six sons managed to maintain all his sons in school but not his only daughter.

Mothers on the other hand, came out with a very clear objective for sending their daughters for wage earning. Mothers looked at the necessity of girls' getting engaged in wage earning activities from a rather practical point of view. For them, other than helping the family income girls also had the responsibility to earn for the future expenditure of their marriage. Thus Mohni said, 'Yeah, there will be a little difficulty, we are so many members, if they are not helping how will we manage? And … the expenditure for their marriage? From where will the money come?' Similar views were also promulgated by Ratni and Moti when they said:

They will go away to their in-laws. From where shall we get the money to send them? (Ratni)

We have to save for her marriage too, you know, the marriage of a girl, we need a lot of money for that. We have to start saving from now. (Moti)

Mansingh, one of the fathers, expressed the need for saving money for the marriage of his daughters and thereby justified girls getting engaged in wage earning activities. Thus he said, 'Shyama is also earning now, we are saving it for her marriage'. As the marriage of a girl involves expenditure, parents tend to get motivated to position their daughters in waged labour early on in preparation of the event. Daughters are considered as burdens to the family due to this expenditure and according to the parents it should be the girls themselves who earn the necessary amount or at least contribute towards it.

Critical contribution or exploitation?

The girls in my sample had their version to share. All those engaged in waged labour acknowledged that they were forced to take up activities that support their family financially. Sugandh said, 'Parents think if girls go and work they will get money, so they take the girls with them for work and do not allow them to study'. Sunita had a similar view:

Yes, they say unless we work what shall we eat? If we go and work they get money and if we go to school no money comes, that is why. They say, work, where will the money come from otherwise? How will the expenses of your marriage be covered? So we girls have to work, earn … no time for school.

Though at the initial stage it looked like the girls' engagement in labour was to bring additional earnings to the house, closer scrutiny however revealed that girls in most instances *replaced* instead of added to the earning of their parents. This was reflected in the accounts of the girls in my research. Rekha for instance said:

Rekha: My mother is not going these days, she is at home. Father also is not working, he is not well, you know, so I have to work … earn. Parents say, unless I work how can we manage the house?

Q: Uh huh, why is your mother not going to work these days? And is your father not working at all?

Rekha: I am going, so she is at home now. … Father goes some days, but he is not well you know, so we have to work.

Rekha's parents were not working regularly after she started working. She was withdrawn from school after class three when her older sister went to her in-laws. She was told that

her father was not well, so she had to take on the responsibility of the house by earning their livelihood. Although one of her older brothers was working after finishing his studies, her contribution was needed at the cost of her schooling. Her joining the labour market had freed her parents from their income-earning responsibilities and they had begun to take their own work casually. The same story was repeated in Radha's and her younger sister's case. As Radha told me, once she and her younger sister started going for daily labour her parents did not work any longer. When asked whether her parents were earning enough to manage the house, she said:

> Radha: No they do not earn that much. They do not get enough work. They are not getting work these days.
> Q: Then how do you get work?
> Radha: We small fellows do the work, we do not cheat, but elders do not always obey the employer, they do not do the full work. The employer wants to employ workers like us because we obey whatever he says. That is why they give us the work and our parents remain at home. Sometimes we think of not going for work, this labour, we do not feel like going but then we think what shall we eat then? The parents say go, so we have to go.

Radha's narrative revealed that her parents' working became irregular after the girls started working and earning. Though the parents said that their daughters were needed to add to the earnings of the family, what they mostly did not reveal was the reality that girls were made to work to free them from the burden of work. The fact that a few of the parents themselves also said that they were not getting enough work confirmed what Radha had indicated. For example, Moti had not gone to work on the day I interviewed her as she had not got any work, on that day. But strangely enough her daughter had been to work.

> Q: How could she get work today? You said there was no work for you because of which you remained home today?
> Moti: That's what, they give work to girls. … Girls get work easily but we have to run here and there for it. For them [girls] there is no problem in finding work.

Q: Is that so? But why?
Moti: Who knows? It is like that only.

Though parents did not want to reveal the fact why they did not go for work or did not get any work, their daughters had the answer for them. As Radha mentioned:

When we were small we were doing the housework and they were going for work outside. When we grew up they remain in the house and we go for labour.

Thus, girls are made to work and earn for their family before they go to their own house, that is their in-laws'. They are exploited by their parents who consider them *parayadhan*, the property of others, and are made to pay for the period of time they live with their biological family. As girls belong to another family, they do not need any caring or nourishing by their parents; instead, they are made to support their family by contributing their labour. Girls earn the family's daily bread, save for their own marriage and also do the entire household work at the same time. Their day normally starts early in the morning, they finish household chores such as cleaning the house, fetching water for the family to be consumed during the day, preparing tea, cooking breakfast and lunch, washing the clothes of all family members, taking care of the cattle if the family has any, and so on and so forth. If they go for waged labour they finish the household chores early and then go to work. If there is more than one girl in the family, the younger one remained in the house to take up the rest of the work in the older one's absence. Sometimes mothers were generous enough to prepare dinner and do other small chores at home. Radha confirmed this state of affairs when she said:

Radha: We get up at 6.00 a.m. First we clean the house, prepare tea and serve everybody, prepare lunch, by the time Mummy gets up.
Q: Does your mother get up late?
Radha: Yeah, then we go to fetch water, then collect firewood, then again prepare food in the evening. The day we go for labour, we finish the work in the house quickly and rush. All other work such as collecting firewood and preparing dinner is done by the person [one of the sisters] who is at home that day.
Q: What about your mother? What does she do?
Radha: We became grown-ups, you know, so she does not work. She says, 'I have grown-up girls, why should I work?'

Similarly in Choksingh's household, the only daughter, Suman was withdrawn from school after class one to attend to all the household chores as her mother, as reported by Choksingh, was not well. But as soon as Suman went to her in-laws, her mother went back to her original role and was doing all the work in the house as there was no other girl in the

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house. This clearly depicts the expectations the family and community at large have of grown-up girls. Girls are made to work and boys are pampered. Parents' obsession of securing a better future for themselves positions girls in the family where they are exploited every moment of the day for their labour.

Girls' labour is sought-after extensively both by their biological parents and their in-laws. As indicated above, parents are often in a hurry to send their daughters to their in-laws as soon as possible to get rid of their responsibilities. But they may also delay sending their daughter to the in-laws in case they need her at home. For example, in Rangji's household as the girls were the breadwinners due to their father's illness, their going to the in-laws was delayed even though the in-laws were demanding otherwise. Rangji said:

> Their marriage is already fixed, the … older one's in-laws are insisting also to send her but now we cannot send them … if they go, how will we manage? That's what I told them, to wait for another few years.

Rangji's wife, Ratni, confirmed this when she said, 'Sabita's in-laws are asking to send her to their house as soon as possible since they need her there for work.' Sabri had a similar view about sending the oldest daughter, who was taking care of the youngest one at the time, to her in-laws. She said, 'When I bring my daughter-in-law then I will send her. Not immediately, after a couple of years.' Her account made it clear that parents are inclined to hold on to their daughters as long as they have not got a replacement for their labour contribution. Radha, one of the girls, said:

> Radha: Yeah, they [in-laws] are always saying that but my parents are saying we will not send now, we will send later. Parents are saying they will send me when I am little bigger, they are saying send immediately, send now.
> Q: Why do your in-laws want you to go there as early as possible?
> Radha: They want that. His [would-be husband] mother is not going to work now-a-days, so they want me to go to their house so that I will do the work at the house and also earn money when I go to work outside.

Thus, as evident from the accounts of the parents and girls in my sample, there is a constant tussle between the biological family and the in-laws family for a girl to keep her in their possession. This longing for keeping girls was unfortunately not due to any love and affection towards girls but based on the desire for the labour that the girls contribute to the families they live in. This indicates vividly the miserable life that girls and women lead in rural India where they are considered only as an object who is meant to serve the (male)

members of the family. They are made to sacrifice their wishes, likings, needs and their rights, including the right to education, to serve the rest of the family and especially its male members.

Abuse in the name of discipline

What does the girls' sacrifice bring them? Regrettably, their labour contribution to the family and their sacrifice does not result in praise or acknowledgement. Instead, the girls were frequently ill-treated and abused by the family members for whom they worked. This was apparent from the bitter experiences the girls in my sample had undergone. Sugandh for instance was not in a position to say no to going to work if she was not willing because of the fear of getting beaten up by her father:

> Sugandh: No, how can I say that to my father, he will beat me, thrash me like anything.
> Q: Do you get beaten sometimes?
> Sugandh: Most of the time, if the baby cries, then they beat me.

Sugandh indicated that she got beaten when her younger sibling, whom she was babysitting, cried. She was also worried to talk to me for too long due to the fear of getting beaten by her parents if her younger sister cried. Seema, another girl, said, 'They love the boys and always scold us girls. […] Not only scolding, we get beaten even for small things.' Radha had the same story to share:

> Radha: We have to do all the work, if we don't, then we get beaten.
> Q: Who beats you?
> Radha: My older brother, if the work he has instructed me to do is not done then he beats me, if we do something wrong then he also beats us.
> Q: Don't your mother or father intervene?
> Radha: Why would they intervene? They also beat me sometimes, if we do something wrong then they beat us. When we do not listen to them or obey them, then they beat us.

Radha, Seema or Sugandh, all had the same life experiences in respect to the treatment they got from their family. By virtue of a common thread, their gender, they were vulnerably positioned in the family and society, and constantly abused and looked down upon, irrespective of their vital contribution to the family. Girls and the future women live a life that is full of fear, anguish and self-pity and they are made to learn to accept all these as their fate as they are females.

Lack of agency

Regardless of the economic and labour contribution of girls to their family, girls and women have no voice or choice in their family. In a patriarchal society, where the decision-making power is bestowed upon men, women are expected to listen or obey orders from the male heads and/or seniors. Their opinions, desires, wishes, and dreams have no value or place in the families to which they contribute. Consequently Radha said:

> What can we dream? What we think about never happens, we village girls, what we want our parents do not allow us to do or become, only what we do not wish happens. What shall we do? We are girls, that is why we have to obey them, do whatever they say us to do. If parents beat us then where shall we go? We can only stay here, so what can we do? Why create problems for ourselves?

Radha did not even dare to dream or aspire to something good for herself as she knew that her dreams would never come true: 'It will never happen that way, the way we want, so what is the use of dreaming, what is the use of saying all that?' Her mentioning of 'we' instead of 'I' was indicative that the same applied to other girls in her family and village. She pointed towards the lack of agency that girls have and their powerlessness. This was also expressed by Seema who said, 'I wanted to study but they [parents] will not allow me', and when Sugandh, whose marriage was already fixed, said about going to her future husband's house, '*Papa* [father] has done it, so I have to go there, what can I do?', or when Rekha said about her wish regarding marriage, 'Whatever my parents say, that I will do'. And Sunita said, 'I would like to go and study up to class ten, but I know, my parents will not allow me to go'. Whether it was their education, marriage or any other thing such as cherishing a dream for themselves, the girls were aware that things would happen in accordance with their parents' wishes and they had no voice. Though all the girls referred to their 'parents' who made decisions pertaining to their lives, the discussion with the mothers revealed that adult women had no greater power in family matters and more or less the same status as their daughters in regard to decision-making. For example, Kamli said, 'Nuh … who listens to me? Nobody listens to me'. She was referring to the decision taken by her husband regarding the withdrawing of their only daughter from school against her will. She further commented:

> How will it be? … Unless the fathers are thinking about it? … Nobody listens to us, women. So you know, … until the fathers are thinking about it, it will not change. … That time there was no school but now it is there, so we should send them. In the city girls are going, why can't our girls?

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Mohni as well said, 'Do you think men consult with us? They simply do what they want. It is we who have to always ask for their permission before doing something, they never ask'. Patriarchy was so embedded in their lives that some women could not think of questioning it. Sugna was a perfect example of this. She did not challenge male decision-making power. In this she fully accepted the patriarchal structures that were customary in her context. When I enquired whether she was ever consulted by her husband before taking any decision, she said, 'What is there to consult? […] I am a woman, what do I know? … Why would he consult with me? They are there to do all this.' The use of 'they' in her statement presumably pertained to men in general and to her husband and other male members in her household in particular. This list could go on and on, as each and every woman I spoke to had the same story to tell – her husband took the decisions not only regarding the education of their children but on every aspect of family life. Rami was only too eager to put her daughters back into school. They had been withdrawn the previous year by her husband after he had had a fight with the teacher. Though she was desperate for her daughters to join the school, she felt powerless and was not in a position to negotiate this with her husband. Instead she thought it might be wise to seek the help of an intermediary and asked me to influence her husband in this regard. She requested this by saying, 'If you say then he may agree, he will never listen to me'. When I did agree to talk to her husband, she further requested that I did not let her husband know that I was talking on her behalf: 'Please don't tell him that I asked you for this'. This undoubtedly reflects the powerlessness of women in the household and the dominance of patriarchy embedded in this society. Though some women showed an inclination to support their daughter's education up to a certain extent, the decision usually was dependent on the wishes of their husbands. This was also observed by Chanana in her study who found that 'the positive attitude of mothers towards their daughters' education was helpful but not sufficient to allow them access to schooling if men were opposed to it' (1996: 124).

 Bhuri's account further confirmed the system of male decision-making prevalent in Indian society. According to her, her husband took decisions when he was alive, and after his death her son was taking decisions for the family. She said, 'When their father was there, he was doing all this, now the son is doing it.' The dominance of male members in the family was evident in how power revolved around the male members of the family and was

automatically passed on to the next male member, overlooking the female head of the family.

However, there was also a silver lining to this cloud. From among the 12 women participants in my research, one woman stood out in her approach to dealing with men. She was the only woman who could influence her husband to send her daughter to school though he was reluctant about it initially. Chanda said:

> He was not ready initially, but now the school is very close by, … we are managing the housework, Mamta is not doing anything, she is very small so she is going. I talked to her father and he agreed.

Though it was a big achievement for Chanda who could convince her husband to send their daughter to school, her husband's affirmation was dependent on crucial issues such as the school being close by, Mamta being small and there being other grown-up girls in the family to look after the chores. Though she was happy about this small achievement of her's, the mother acknowledged male sovereignty in decision-making and was sceptical about the endurance of her influence on her husband. She thus said about decisions taken in her family:

> Chanda: My husband, not only education, he alone decides about all the matters whatsoever.
> Q: Do you think you have nothing to say in this?
> Chanda: No, … I did manage to convince him to send Mamta but with much difficulty.
> Q: Yes, that's what I was thinking, you did manage that.
> Chanda: But I don't know how long I can manage that, any time he may say, 'enough now'.

But unfortunately there were not many Chandas. Girls are taught right from the beginning not to question male dominance in the family and society and to accept their own subordination as their fate. As familial circumstances and experiences made them to internalise this fact and acknowledge it unconditionally, girls grew up with the acceptance of patriarchy and a lack of strategies to challenge it. This was manifested in the statement of my female interviewees when they said repeatedly, 'we are girls, what can we do' or 'I am a woman, what do I know'.

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The social positioning of women

The secondary position of women in the family and in society makes them the subordinate lot who merely carry out the orders of the male members of the family. They lack a sense of agency and are regarded as dependents on men throughout their lives. This was evident when the fathers in my sample discussed the decision-making process in their respective families. For example, in response to my query about who takes decisions in the family, whether it is he himself, or his wife or they both, Kamal said, 'Why would she [his wife] decide?' Likewise, Bhima said, 'What would she say? She won't say anything'. Yet another father had the same view:

> Kalu: I do it, we do it.
> Q: What do you mean by 'we'? Does your wife also decide?
> Kalu: No, no, I am there in the house, I decide. Why should she decide?

All these men were even surprised to be asked about this particular issue as they thought it was obvious that decisions in the family were to be taken by its male members. By returning the question back to me 'why should she decide' or 'what would she say', they affirmed what Kabeer (2003: n. p.) refers to as 'extreme forms of patriarchy', the social practice prevalent in this community and the subordinate position that women have. Not only these words but the tone and the manner of the response, all revealed the reality of the restriction or voicelessness of the women.

Some of the men questioned the relevance of involving women in the decision-making process. For them, it was ridiculous to ask about women's opinion in family matters as according to them women do not know anything. As Balu said:

> Balu: Umm … decisions … I take.
> Q: Does your wife say anything in this regard?
> Balu: No, she does not say anything. She does not know all these.

Bansu who claimed initially that decisions in his house were taken with the consent of all family members, denied the involvement of his wife in the process. According to him:

> Bansu: Decision … my father takes, I take, anybody, with everybody's consensus.
> Q: What do you mean by 'everybody'? Does that include all the members of the family?
> Bansu: No, my father and me, we cannot involve children in this.
> Q: What about Mamta's mother?
> Bansu: No, when we decide, what would she say? Nothing, she does not know anything.

Women were considered as 'not knowing anything' and thus not worth involving in the process of decision-making. They were denied their voice and were regarded as the silent workforce of the family. Girls' and women's voices were not heard and they were not even allowed to offer their opinion. Though most of the women were earning members of the family and thereby contributing to the family income, their earning status did not alleviate their position in the family. They were still considered subordinate, inferior and secondary to the male members of the family and were discriminated against in the name of their being 'girls' and 'women' and thus 'not knowing anything'.

This insignificant status of women in society was marked by gender inequalities due to their primary involvement in home-bound activities. Though they were not entirely confined to the home and had to go out to take up the responsibilities of adding to the family income which would otherwise be the sole responsibility of the male members, they still lacked any sense of agency. Despite their labour contributions they were not considered equal partners in the family. This means that girls and women were exploited by the male members of the family. The importance of the men was so embedded in this community that it did not allow the women to live their lives to its fullest. This subsidiary status of women militated against the girls and affected their education adversely. Some of my women interviewees indicated this. For example Chanda said:

> I think the main thing is that nobody wants that girls should study, if they [girls] study they will do things according to their wish. Nobody wants them to understand what is good for them so that they can be made subordinate to their husbands, do all the work that they are told to do.

Her statement unfolded the bitter truth that underpins this discrimination against girls and women. Girls are not allowed to study or study after a particular class to ensure that they remain subordinate to men and carry on the age-old practice of serving men silently without being able to question this.

Who can break the tradition?

As indicated in the above statement by Chanda, 'women view education as a way of escaping tradition' (Raynor, 2005: 95). The cultural practices that hold a community together are viewed as irreversible and certainly strongly militate against girls' education. In line with Mishra's argument, in my sample too the 'prevailing social and cultural norms for girls [were to] prepare them for adult lives as wives and mothers' (2005: 181).

Traditional practices such as early marriage, paying off dowry, safeguarding girls' virginity before marriage were found to be more important to parents than educating girls, and I discuss these in detail in the following sub-sections.

Early marriage

The early marriage of children was customary in all the households in my study irrespective of their social, economical or educational status. The general practice was to fix the marriage of the children, both sons and daughters, at a very early age, from one or two years of age upwards. The community members in one of the villages confirmed this fact.

> In our village the marriages of children are fixed in childhood. From the day the child is born, some do it when they are one year, two years, three years. Up to the fifth year. That is the final year, if they delay, they cannot find a boy or girl for their child. (Focus group discussion)

This community feeling was also reflected in the individual views of both men and women. Nanalal for instance said, 'In childhood the marriages get fixed, then they go home when they become big. Some go at the age of nine years, 11 years or 13 years'. Bansu said, 'The *engagement*[47] is done in childhood, at the age of seven or eight, at five and six years also'. The voices of the women echoed similar points. One of the women present with Sabri during her interview made it clearer, 'No, … marriage is fixed when they are a child but they will go when they become fit for marriage'. On the other hand Moti had no idea of a particular age for the betrothal or marriage of children. For her, girls getting grown-up was the indication that they should be sent to their house. 'Age, … I don't know what age, when she is a little grown-up then she will go [to her in-laws' house]' (Moti).

By 'grown-up' parents indicated girls attaining puberty. Attaining puberty was the preferred stage for girls to be sent to their in-laws but this might get delayed by individual family circumstances as discussed earlier in this chapter. Though girls joined their in-laws at puberty, the parents want to ensure that their daughter got her life-partner as soon as she was born. They demonstrated a kind of fear that permeates parents' thinking that was responsible for rushing to fix the marriage early. Bansu said:

> Bansu: Because, once they grow up then nobody will give their daughters or sons to them.

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[47]Betrothal is commonly expressed as 'engagement' in Indian context.

Q: Why is it that people will not give their sons or daughters? Can you explain it a little more?

Bansu: I mean if the child remains without *engagement*, then they think there is something wrong with the child, some problem with the child or family. Then the child will remain like that. That is why it is important to do it in childhood, then marriage is done afterwards, later on, whenever they wish, but it has to be fixed when they are young.

This tradition was very important for the parents who did not want to move beyond the threshold of the cultural practices that are ubiquitous in their context. The 'they' in the former part of the statement referred to society at large. Parents differentiated between agreeing a girl's marriage and her chance of attending school. Bansu said:

Q: How does the fixing of girls' marriage affect their study?

Bansu: No, no, nothing like that.

Q: Do they go to school after their *engagement* also?

Bansu: Yeah, … some of them are going if the parents allow them, when they become grown-up only they go to the in-laws, otherwise they may go to school.

Bansu's use of terms such as 'nothing like that', 'may' and 'if parents allow', points towards the uncertainty surrounding girls' school attendance after their betrothal. At the same time it also presumably signifies the existence of the practice of withdrawing girls from attending school after their marriage was fixed. This was substantiated when Kamli talked about the reason for her daughter dropping out of school.

Kamli: Yeah, her marriage was fixed, she was to go to her house after a few years. My health was also not good, so she remained home.

Q: Had her marriage not been fixed, do you think she would have gone to school?

Kamli: Yeah, I think so, I thought she would go for a couple of years … but it was not there for her, … her marriage got fixed, her in-laws were not in favour of school and all. … They would not have liked it so …

Although Kamli raised the issue of her own degraded health, the fact that her daughter's marriage got fixed came out as the reason for her dropping out of school. As indicated by Kamli, after the girls' betrothal, parents' decision regarding their daughter's education is highly dependent on the opinion of the future in-laws' family. As in her case, her daughter had to stop going to school after her betrothal as the in-laws were not in favour of it. The fixing of the marriage, the unfavourable opinion of the in-laws towards school combined with the girls growing up became an insurmountable barrier for educating girls.

The practice of early marriage was also highlighted by Jha and Jhingran (2005) who argue that the prevalence of early marriage is one of the social practices that restricts girls' participation in school education. According to Mishra '[t]oo often, marriage is seen as a higher priority than education' (2005: 181). In contrast to my data, Mishra found in rural Ethiopia, 'girls as young as five or seven years of age are "betrothed" and sent to live with their "in-laws". These girls either do not get to school at all, or have to stop their education in order to work in the home of their husband and his family' (Mishra, 2005: 181). Unlike Mishra's findings though, the girls in my sample remained with their biological parents and joined their in-laws at puberty, but they suffered the same fate in respect to their education.

Pay more if you educate more

Despite being considered a social evil and the existence of laws against this practice, dowry was customary in the community that I studied, as it is in India as a whole. The parents of a girl have to pay a dowry to the groom's family at the time of marriage as well as bearing the costs of the marriage itself. Kalu confirmed this practice of dowry. He said:

> Yeah, in our society we have to pay a lot of dowry. The minimum will be Rs. 35,000 to Rs. 50,000, sometimes even Rs. 100,000 we have to pay for girls.

As is evident from Kalu's account, parents had to pay a considerable amount for the marriage of their daughters, ranging from a minimum of approximately 624 GBP to a maximum of approximately 1,250 GBP which certainly affected economically resource-poor families. Parents therefore tended to start saving for this expenditure from when the daughter was very young. This was manifested in their responses, e. g. 'we have to save for her marriage' or 'we are saving for her marriage'. One of the fathers I interviewed had to borrow money from the money lender to meet the expenses of his daughter's marriage, 'Yeah, … I have borrowed for the marriage of my older daughter' (Bapulal), he said. The practice of dowry mingled with the preference for sons in the Indian context compels fathers to think twice before deciding for the education of their daughters. In a system of patriarchy which calls for male sovereignty, 'husbands are expected to be more educated than their wives […] [t]he rate of dowry is generally linked with the level of education' (Jha and Jhingan, 2005: 233). This implies that parents have to look for a groom more educated than their daughter and 'the higher the level of education [of groom], the higher is the amount of dowry' (Jha and Jhingan, 2005: 233). My research also indicated this. Parents were presumably reluctant to educate their daughters more, for fear of having to

arrange for a higher dowry if their daughter was better educated. Thus it was not surprising when Kalu mentioned that they tried to find a groom of their own status and level and said:

> No, no we cannot do that, we cannot afford it, higher level, more educated means more expenditure, we cannot afford to spend that much, give that much.

The use of the word 'give' in his account indicated the dowry. His use of 'more educated means more expenditure' suggested the direct and positive linkage of a demand for more dowries by more educated grooms. When questioned specifically about this linkage he said:

> They will ask more if the boy is more educated, Rs. 45,000, 55,000 or even Rs. 60,000 to 70,000 they may ask. But I think not more than Rs. 100,000. Normally they will not ask more than that. At the moment that is the maximum rate in our society.

Though he gave a clear picture of the trend that persists in this community regarding the increase of demand of dowry with the increase of a girl's education, he was not very certain about the maximum one can demand. Although he was not very sure, he indicated that parents might end up having to pay Rs. 100,000 if they dared to educate their daughter beyond the customary level. One of the mothers too confirmed this:

> See, in our community getting a suitable boy is not that easy, if the girl is studying more … and the boy she is *engaged* to is not that much educated then it will be a problem, … isn't it? You have to break that relation and search for a more educated boy … and, they will ask you for more. (Sugna)

Consequently it was felt wiser either to withhold or withdraw daughters, as my research showed: 17 withheld and 13 withdrew out of a total of 35 girls, to minimise the expenditure at the time of their marriage. Thus, as is apparent here, the custom of dowry goes sturdily against the education of girls.

Virginity before marriage is a must

In Indian society virginity is much regarded and considered as an essential criterion for marriage. Hence, the safekeeping of girls' sexuality becomes a major factor underpinning early marriage and leads to an early departure of girls from school. This factor was strongly highlighted by the parents I interviewed. Nanalal for instance was of the view that:

> Some get married at the age of nine years, 11 years or 13 years. In childhood the marriages get fixed, then they go home when they become big. We do not keep girls in the house for long, they are a big responsibility, we have always to be vigilant so that nothing can go wrong with them.

His repeated use of 'we' denoted that the practice was a collective one rather than an individual act. He explained himself what he meant by 'girls being a big responsibility'.

> Sending them out with boys always brings problems, it ends up with problems only. They should be clean and go to their family without any problem. In case they get any bad reputation then their future is gone. No parents want anything bad for their daughters, we want their welfare only. … Nothing should go wrong with them, that is why we take precautions, that's all. … While studying if something goes wrong then that may create problems for her marriage. Parents are not after their marriage just like that, there is this reason behind that. (Nanalal)

The view seemed to be that girls could be protected from the danger of premarital sex if they were married at a very young age. This was obvious from Nanalal's account who hinted at the virginity of girls by saying 'they should be clean' or 'nothing should go wrong with them'. He, or in any case, none of the parents openly discussed girls being exposed to the temptation of sex, though all of them hinted at it. This is because the discussion of sex itself is considered a taboo in the Indian context. The bad reputation of a girl can ruin her entire life as indicated in the concerns put forward by this father.

The same concern was echoed in the views of other fathers. Mangu said, 'Their in-laws will ask several things. If something goes wrong with the girl then you know, what will happen to her? Her life will be spoiled'. Mansingh even gave the example of the consequences of keeping girls at home for long. He cited the case of two girls from adjacent villages who eloped with boys:

> Yeah, if we don't keep an eye on them they will do anything, then the parents will suffer along with the girl. There are incidences in the nearby villages, two girls ran away with some boys. Their parents had to face all the shame.

Girls and women are considered the honour of the house and the family; the bad reputation of a girl brings disgrace and embarrassment to the entire family and thus has to be avoided at all costs. As Tandon observes, 'a daughter [is] a debt which [has] to be discharged honourably' (1968, in Chanana, 1996: 112). Thus parents justified the withdrawal of girls from school by saying that they had to 'take precaution'. Adolescence was considered a critical stage in a girl's life which if not handled carefully could prove disastrous for her later life. Rangji said very categorically:

> Rangji: This age is very … crucial you know, anything can happen … so
> one has to be careful. … Otherwise there will be no study … and in the
> name of study only problems will come home.
> Q: What sort of problems are you anticipating?
> Rangji: This you know, problems of … boys and girls being together …
> there will be problem, then, their marriage will become a problem.

The age of adolescence was considered decisive and open to temptations and thereby prone to problems. This father also indicated the possible problem when girls and boys remain together, in this case, in school. Parents feared that girls' proximity to boys in school after a certain age would lead to their indulgence in premarital sex and thought that this could be prevented by not sending girls to school.

Nanalal raised an additional dimension to marrying children in general and girls in particular at a very young age. He said:

> If you keep them for long then they will do whatever they want when they
> become big. So we fix their marriage before they start thinking anything.
> Not only girls, boys also, their marriage is also fixed when they are small,
> this is done to avoid problems at the later stage.

Independent thinking and deciding for themselves by girls was not approved of by the community with the fear that it would go against the customary practices. The goals of education that inflict independent thinking and questioning certainly go against the patterns of tradition and thus parents tended to avoid it.

Girls' getting sexually exploited on their way to their school was highlighted by Bapulal. Though the school in the nearby village was not very far in general, it was considered relatively far for the girls to commute and thus to be avoided. He said: 'Ah … not very far but you know, girls cannot go there.' Girls could not be sent to far-off places for their education. Here, the rules were not same for boys and girls. The mothers in my sample as well were concerned for the safety of their daughters. None of them approved of girls going out of the village to attend a school in a nearby village. Thus Mohni said very firmly:

> No … no, we don't send our girls out of the village. No, we cannot send
> them, there will be many problems, who will look after them on the way? It
> is very dangerous, all sorts of people are there, … grown-up girls are always
> at risk. We cannot send them. No place is safe for girls, for the grown-up
> girls. We villagers cannot do that, … because of the fear that something will
> happen, *unch nich* [problem].

Whereas the fathers focussed on the girls and what might happen to them, the mothers were more concerned with the outside world and its unsafeness. This was indicated in phrases such as 'no place is safe for girls', 'who will look after them on the way' and 'all sorts of people are there'. Women pointed the finger towards the world out there and not the girls. Men thought that girls' sexuality had to be controlled whereas women thought the girls needed to be protected from the unsafe world that they live in. Bhuri said fittingly in this regard, 'environment, situation is not good for girls, we have to protect them always'. However, one of the fathers did mention society at large being unsafe for girls. He said:

> Who will take care of them on the way? The parents are in the field, they cannot go with them. Parents cannot send older girls outside alone, things are not safe now-a-days, if something goes wrong then who will be responsible? […] In the village one has to be very careful. (Bapulal)

Protecting girls from the evils of society was more important for parents than to educate them. The need to protect girls had certain underlying reasons. Girls are considered the honour of the family (Chanana, 1996) and a bad reputation carries shame and dishonour. All parents were very much conscious of this when they talked about protecting girls from all evils and the outside world. Bapulal for example, said:

> Yeah, […] here if something goes wrong it means it will be known to everybody. Then the life of the girl and the family is gone, nothing can be done, very difficult.

Mangu said:

> Yeah, their in-laws will ask several things. If something goes wrong with the girl then you know, what will happen to her, her life will be spoiled. They will not take her and she will be a burden to us for the entire life.

If some untoward incident happens with the girl before she joins them girls are rejected by their future husbands and in-laws. But the same does not apply to boys. For them the rules are different. Nanalal made this apparent when he said:

> Boys, you know our society, there is all freedom for boys, but the girls are always questioned. If a boy comes home late in the night, nobody in the family will ask him why is he late, but will that happen if it is a girl? No, they will ask thousands of questions, scolding her, her going out will be stopped, all that.

A boy can easily escape if he does something wrong but not a girl. She is questioned and crucified for the smallest mistake. Mistakes attributed to her are unpardonable. The parents indicated that no family would accept a girl with a bad reputation as their daughter-in-law.

Thus it was not only considered important to fix the marriage of a girl in childhood, it was equally important to save the girl from what they considered immorality to protect their own status and reputation in the community. Underlying these concerns was the ideology of the 'control of female sexuality to protect female chastity, virginity and family honour. This ideology either prevent[s] or limit[s] girls' access to schooling' (Chanana, 1996: 113). At the same time, the parents were very careful to ensure that the responsibility that they got rid off with their daughter's marriage should not come back to them. Though girls contribute economically to the family that they live in, they are still considered as a 'burden' by their biological family. Kanta who too believed that girls are burden to the family shared her own experience and narrated an incident that happened in her own family to substantiate those feelings:

> If you send grown-up girls to school and delay their marriage then it is not good. In our family, I will tell you, my elder brother-in-law's daughter was studying and did not marry, they allowed her to do according to her wish. She was studying and then she ran away with a boy. Her parents were thinking she was going for studying, but how can they know where she was going? She was going here and there and finally she ran away with some boy. Who knows whether he has something or not? We do not know about his caste also, who knows he may be from a lower caste. […] Now her in-laws will not take her. This is what happens if we keep the girls at home for long.

She also gave an example of the result of girls becoming independent in their thinking and why parents feared that. Marrying a boy of the same caste, same status and with economic stability was very important to parents. The groom should be economically able to provide a decent life for the girl but more than that, being of the same caste was paramount and could not be disregarded at any cost (Dumont, 1980; Hutton, 1963; Sarasvati, 1888; Prakash, n.d.).

None of the parents were ready to violate the social practices prevalent in their communities. They feared that providing independence to girls might lead to infringement of these practices and the entrenched role of girls and women in society. This sentiment encouraged the parents to devalue their daughters' education. Bhuri, for example said:

> We ... ah ... have to go along with the pattern set by our society. Our elders ...ah ...I mean ancestors have made certain rules and we have to follow those.

Nanalal had the view that there must be some logic behind these rules and that no one should question them. He said:

> Why means ...what can I say why? It is like that. Our ancestors have made these rules, they must have done this by looking at all the aspects of life. They are our ancestors, whatever they have made, it is for the good of society, if we do not obey them, then there will be no rules, there will be only problems.

For him the rules and regulations supposedly laid down by their ancestors were irreversible. He visualised total chaos in society if they were not needed. Presumably, men, though not necessarily consciously, propagate preserving these rules as it supports their dominant position in society. This is what Bourdieu argues as being 'beyond the grip of conscious control and therefore not amenable to transformations or corrections' (2001: 95). This sub-conscious internalization of 'masculine domination' embedded in society makes men maintain 'discrepancies between [their] declarations and practices' (Bourdieu, 2001: 95), in this case, professing to support girls' education in general but not allowing their own daughters to carry on their studies.

On the other hand, the oppressed group, the women, felt differently. Kamli for instance said:

> They think girls are to go to their house. Our ancestors made the rule that we women will be going to the in-laws and our marriage is to be done in childhood. ... That time there was no school, no education so they made it like that. ... But now also the same thing is going on.

She questioned the relevance of the norms or patterns that were pronounced by the ancestors to the present-day context. She argued that these norms were based on circumstances of the past society which according to her, were no longer in place. She seemed to suggest that one should move in line with the changing society and to change conventions to fit today's world. As a woman, she did not feel that injustice had been done to females by denying them agency, she simply thought that change would be appropriate.

However, she was a lonely voice in this. Following the norms set by the ancestors and the inclination to follow the crowd was very much apparent amongst the parents. For them following the system was very important as they identified strongly with their communities. Thus Nanalal said, 'We have to remain as per the society, otherwise you will become a matter of gossip. All fingers will be pointed towards you'. Bhuri's statement too

echoed the same feelings when she said, 'We have to ... you know, take care of society too'. Swimming with the current was valued by the parents to avoid criticism by other community members. Kanta made it clear why it was important to stick to tradition. She narrated the fate of a girl who had eloped with a boy against the wishes of her family. She said, when the girl was brought back:

> She had a bad name, everybody came to know about it, these things cannot be hidden, it spreads. The life of the girl is ruined now, that is why I always keep an eye on my daughters.

Though some of the parents valued the education of their daughters, they did not think it was advisable to go against traditional practices; rather, they were comfortable with acting in line with community rules. They justified this by saying:

> We are in a society, we have to see so many things, … see that nothing is going wrong, uh … we follow the society, otherwise we have to listen to so many things. We cannot live without society, that is why. (Mansingh)

Following society and doing what others in the community did was highly valued. Nobody wanted to stand apart from the community by acting differently, for example through delaying the marriage of girls or sending them to school. For parents the norms of the community were unchallengeable and they took them for granted. This was apparent as they frequently said, 'that's the way it is'. They manifested the 'field' and 'habitus' Bourdieu refers to where the social world shapes the individual.

Moving away from this did not seem to be that easy. Parents and other community members were sceptical about the possibility of a change of norms though some of them felt that it was desirable. Choksingh for example, said that he had tried to convince people to do away with certain social norms that he felt were not desirable. He said:

> Yeah, but nobody thinks that way, what to do. I even tried to persuade people, I organised a meeting, called people from nearby villages, all of them came but nothing happened, nobody agreed. You know, our society is spread everywhere. So, all have to agree, then only this can happen, only a few villages cannot do that, it is not that simple, it is a very big thing, not that easy.

The members of the same village too had similar opinions. They took the view that to attempt to change the rules was like challenging the entire community. They said:

> Um hum, if our village decides and does that what will happen? All the villages have to do that. Not our village or their village, the entire community has to do that. Yeah, the entire community has to decide.

> If only we decide then nothing is going to happen. And our community is spread from here to there [mentioned the name of a few adjacent districts and states]. Some of them tried but that did not work. … Yeah, did not work, they said, we will do how it is done till today. (Focus group discussion)

As illustrated above though there were some attempts in the community to break away from tradition it did not work out and they went back to the old practices such as early marriage and sending girls to their in-laws as soon as they attain puberty. As a result, these traditional practices take precedence over girls' education.

Conclusions

By and large my data showed that girls, though they are practically the strongest pillar of their family, whilst living in their biological family were considered a burden by their parents and in-laws. They worked day and night from a very young age, shouldered most of the household responsibilities and contributed to the family financially. Yet, their labour and economic contributions went unrecorded and were in general overlooked by the family. They were considered the property of others. Their 'to be married off' status positioned them in an exploited in-between state. They were not considered a valuable member of their biological family and spending on their education was regarded as a lost investment. As girls join their in-laws' family after their marriage, their biological parents were obsessed with extracting maximum value from the girls during their period of stay in their house. The girls were not only made to earn their own bread, they were supposed to contribute to the family earnings to meet the requirements of other family members and to save for the expenditure of their marriage. This expectation jeopardized girls' educational chances. Girls had to sacrifice their life in doing housework, taking care of younger siblings and earning for their family so that the boys could study, other family members could have enough food and their parents could have a better life during their old age. The girls internalised and accepted their duties in the family.

Although the non-enrolment and withdrawal of girls from school is attributed to poverty by the parents (see page 153) who consider the contribution of their daughters to their household as critical and inevitable, a closer look revealed the fact that poverty was actually used as an excuse to conceal certain patriarchal values and the inclination of the parents to hold on to traditional practices. In actual fact the parents were unwilling to 'water a neighbour's tree' but inclined to obtain the fruit to its maximum. The patri-local

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marriage system inhibited the girls' chances for education. The parents had a strong tendency to strive for a secure and economically sound life in their old age. This predisposition justified a biased treatment towards the girls and allowed for positive discrimination in favour of sons by sending them to school and making the daughters work and earn. The parents' longing for a better future became one reason contributing to damaging both the present and the future of their own daughter. As the confirmation of traditional values and practices served the dominance of the male folk, they tended to deny any possibility of change. Thus the girls ended up doing the household chores for the family, taking care of family members and going for waged labour to add to their family income. In the process they freed their parents from their parental responsibilities as providers if not fully, certainly to a considerable extent.

Though girls and women worked inside and outside the home and earnt, they were denied agency in the family and community. They had no voice whatsoever and did not even feel able to dare to think about their dreams and aspirations. They were made to follow the instructions and orders of the male members of the family without expecting any return. Any independence or reluctance to obey led to the girls' abuse. The prevalence of patriarchal values positioned the girls and women at the bottom of the societal ladder and situated the male members as the decision makers of the family. In the process of their socialisation the girls were made to internalise that they had to obey orders and serve and not voice their concerns. Girls and women frequently appeared to feel powerless and accepted their subordinate position. Though they preferred education for girls, they were not in a position to even talk about it to the male head of the family.

The practice of early marriage, and the anxiety of upholding girls' chastity and thereby the honour of the family, all add up to further discrimination against girls and turn out to be barriers to girls' education. Parents frequently mentioned the need to protect girls who are considered vulnerable, especially during adolescence, to the temptation of sex as well as sexual exploitation by males. Surprisingly, boys were not seen as co-responsible in case a girl got involved in pre-marital sex or sexually harassed by them. A bad reputation was always associated with girls, not boys. The parents thought that a bad reputation would spoil the life of a girl which implied that the girl would not be accepted by her in-laws. It also implied that a girl would have to remain with her parents for the rest of her life and the

parents were not ready to let that happen as keeping a daughter was always considered a burden. As a consequence, parents thought it wiser to take precautions in the form of fixing the betrothal of the girls at a very early age, withdrawing them from school as soon as they were considered grown-up and sending them to their in-laws immediately after they attained puberty. The girls were placed firmly under the control of males through early marriage to protect them from premarital sex as virginity before marriage is highly regarded. The development of individual and critical thinking in a girl was considered a threat to this and parents were not ready to take that risk. Thus marriage and shifting the responsibility for the girl to another family became paramount and education which was not considered relevant to the future role of a girl as home maker took a back seat.

The tendency to act in accordance with the norms of the community was critical for the parents. As observed by Kabeer, 'the "social-embeddedness" of the household within wider social relationships' is responsible for locating 'household decision-making within a sociological framework' which in turn is 'concerned with the broad patterns of behaviour' and the 'emergence of institutionalised relationships, governed by recognised rules and norms'(2003: n. p .). In line with Kabeer's statement the parents were not ready to break the social norms that they believed to be from their ancestors. The fear that they might be stigmatised by other members of the community in case the norms were not followed permeated parents' mind. They preferred to be part of the crowd. Although some of the parents illustrated a modern mentality by valuing girls' education, at the same time they considered themselves the keepers of traditional and cultural practices. In a way they demonstrated what Malhotra observed: 'change had to be limited so as not to question traditional norms and patriarchal relationships' (1992, in Chanana, 1996: 114). Some parents wanted to educate their daughters but were not ready to take chances by sending them out because for them the world outside was not safe. In contrast to their sometimes positive view of girls' education, almost all felt that for girls home is the right place.

It is interesting that some of the women did challenge the relevance of practicing some of the traditional norms. For them the norms needed to be amended, they needed to keep pace with the progressing world around them. But due to a sense of a lack of agency and as the decision-making power in the family was bestowed upon men, women's desire to welcome

change and thereby their enhanced empowerment remained a distant dream. Kamli for example wondered what the government could do to facilitate girls' education and said:

> What would the government do? It cannot change the rules that our ancestors have made. But … yeah, it should talk to people, men … to send the girls for studying. I think … they will listen to the government.

Her response made it apparent that it is men who need to be educated regarding the benefits of girls' education. I now turn my attention from the community to the school to analyse how far the schooling system is vital in attracting girls and parents. Teachers are considered to be the key actors in the context of a school (Rampal, 2000). Thus in the next chapter I investigate the teachers' working conditions and the perspectives they brought to promoting girls' education.

Chapter 6
Teacher – the Strongest or the Weakest Link?

As I discussed in Chapter 4, many parents of the out-of-school girls were critical of the teachers' behaviour in their village school. They thought that the teachers did not bother much about the school and teaching, and were irregular in their duties, as a result of which the learning level of their children was inexcusably low. I decided it is important to explore what lies on the other side of this coin. In order to understand the exclusion of girls from school education, I tried to explore the environment of the school and comprehend the perspective of the teachers which, along with parental decisions, influences girls' participation in education. Parental decisions, I argue, are also influenced by the school environment, that is, the image the school creates for the parents. Hence I decided to investigate the circumstances that the teachers were working in, the expertise they brought to their profession, their expectations from the profession and the struggle they had to undergo as teachers. Talking to teachers brought a new dimension to my research which I shall discuss in this chapter. Here, I take a closer look at the teachers' perspectives on a) their background and situation, i.e. their educational qualifications, their professional environment and tasks undertaken, b) their preparedness to carry out their assigned tasks, c) their relative status in the community, d) the girls, the parents, the community and their own work, and e) their relation to the education department of which they are a part.

Some of the issues that I discuss here may not seem, at first, to have any direct link or influence on the participation of girls in school education. But as the parents and the girls in my research pointed out (discussed in chapter 4) the level of teachers' involvement in school affairs, their presence or absence in the school, their preparedness to handle pupils, their relation with the community, their levels of motivation and commitment to the profession, all contributed towards encouraging or discouraging, motivating or de-motivating parents in sending their daughters to school. Thus I decided to include all these factors in my research.

The first issue I want to discuss is the fact that the teachers I interviewed were all male. Though the state government has a policy of promoting the recruitment of female

teachers by operating a quota of 30 percent women teachers (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1995), I found no female teachers in the schools I studied. Fewer female teachers seemed to be engaged in schools in rural areas. According to the by now somewhat dated MPHDR (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1995), women teachers in rural schools constitute less than ten percent. The more recent 7th All India Educational Survey revealed that in the Ratlam district there are only 770 female teachers in schools in rural areas compared to 1290 in urban areas at the primary level (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2002). Further, the number of female teachers in rural areas was significantly lower when compared to their male counterparts (2268). In contrast and from my own observation, I found a primary school in the state capital where all the teachers (six in total) were female, with an enrolment of 193; that is with a pupil-teacher ratio of 32:1 (well below the national average of 40:1). This means that the state capital school had a much better pupil-teacher ratio than the rural ones, and also that there was a concentration of women teachers in urban schools. Thus there is a clear gap between policy and practice which is not favourable to correcting the present imbalance. Jha and Jhingran also found an absence of women teachers in rural areas in their study. They argue that:

> The availability of women teachers, who inspire confidence in parents and provide role models for girls who otherwise rarely come across any other educated women in their own context, is abysmally low in rural schools. (2005: 239)

It can be argued that in the absence of role models in the form of female teachers in school the girls and their parents were discouraged from school education (Jahan, 1998). The Global Campaign for Education also acknowledged this by stating: '[t]he presence of female teachers tends to make schools more girl-friendly and provide role models for girls' (2005: 41).

According to Karlekar (2000), the presence of women teachers in school is important to encourage parents to send their daughters, particularly in rural areas. The gap between the rhetoric and the practice, and the poor implementation of policies which means that teachers can manage to get themselves posted to schools in urban areas through political

patronage adds to this problem[48]. Indicating a prevalence of corruption around this, the Global Campaign for Education (2005: 41) revealed that, '[t]eacher deployment in some countries is so blatantly corrupt that it is impossible for rational and objective staffing practices to be adopted'. As identified by Jha and Jhingran (2005: 239), problems such as a 'lack of basic facilities in schools', 'poor transportation facilities' and an 'absence of an orientation among women teachers to take up the challenges of teaching in rural areas' need to be addressed to encourage women teachers' participation in rural schools.

Educational qualifications and the profession

There were five teachers posted in the schools that I visited (I interviewed three of them); they all had the minimum qualification required for a teacher, that is completion of class 12. Additionally, four out of the five teachers had undertaken a certificate course called D.Ed. (Diploma in Education), a professional course designed and implemented by the education department through distance mode. This professional course, widely known as 'operation quality'[49] aimed at clearing the backlog of professionally untrained teachers in the state (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2008a: 115). This indicates that professional training was not originally a mandatory[50] requirement for becoming a teacher in this particular state.

Although the teachers in my sample were formally qualified for the tasks they had to perform, their performance was questioned by the community members as my field experience suggests. Rampal argues that teachers who have low academic qualifications and are 'themselves products of a poor [education] system', struggle to deliver their duties. She further highlights: 'In different surveys conducted in India and Pakistan, teachers themselves performed very poorly in questions meant for primary school

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[48]Teachers who have good contacts with public representatives can get themselves posted to a school of their choice or can alter their posting/transfer in their favour. This phenomenon is commonly observed in the Indian scenario though this may be unfamiliar in a western context such as the UK.

[49]'Operation quality' is a two-year diploma course designed by the state government and recognised by the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), the central level advisory body for teacher education. Teachers working in government schools at elementary level are registered on this course. The syllabus for this course was designed by the department of education to cater for the needs of the state. The examination is conducted by an external agency, Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University (MPBOU), the only university in Madhya Pradesh conducting courses in distance education mode.

[50]Professional training was not a mandatory criterion for the recruitment of teachers at elementary level in the state until 2007-08. The new policy of the state requires a person to be professionally qualified in the form of a D. Ed or a B. Ed course to be eligible to teach at elementary level (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2008b).

students' (2000: 2528). Teachers' own weak knowledge of the subject matter they teach makes them struggle while teaching and so they tend to avoid it; the results are poor learning levels among the students. And the parents I interviewed did complain about this. According to the parents there was no point sending their daughters to school if they were not learning anything there.

Along with a rich knowledge of the subject matter, teachers' enthusiasm too plays a vital role in the profession. This is what Karleker (2000: 86) calls, 'an encouraging mind set'. It is noteworthy here that of the three teachers I interviewed, two were not at all satisfied with the profession they were in, whereas the third one seemed to be fairly satisfied as a teacher. This dissatisfaction was revealed when Ghanshyam answered my question of how happy he was as a teacher with:

> Ghanshyam: Happy? What is there to be happy about? I just have to do this, that's it.
> Q: Are you not happy as a teacher?
> Ghanshyam: No, now-a-days teachers have no respect, this job has nothing to offer, neither respect nor money, nothing. I came into it so I am there, otherwise …
> Q: Did you want to be a teacher?
> Ghanshyam: No, never.
> Q: Why?
> Ghanshyam: Umm, nobody wants to be a teacher these days, but that was all that was available, so …

Ghanshyam, like several others, came into this profession not by choice but as a manifestation of his helplessness. He felt helpless as there was no other job available and he had to grab the one that was at hand. He generalised the feeling of his fellow teachers by saying 'nobody wants to be a teacher'. Rampal too reports that 'most teachers, especially males, take up teaching as a last resort' (2000: 2528). The issue of the teaching profession not being able to attract people was also highlighted by Nussbaum: 'Pedagogy is receiving less attention and the standards of primary education seem to be caught in a vicious circle where good people are not coming into teaching because there is no social prestige' (2005, n. p.). Additionally, the campaign briefing of the Global Campaign for Education (2006: 7) drew attention to the poor condition of the teaching profession by saying that 'for policy-makers, teachers remain last in line for investment and attention. As a result, the teaching profession is on the whole overstretched and under-rewarded,

leading to demoralisation and attrition out of the profession' (also see Carol, 2003). Thus like Ghanshyam, many others had come to the profession unenthusiastically.

This was exacerbated by the unconducive environment that their profession provided. As Ramesh put it: 'Look at the conditions we are working in. Is it possible to teach three classes together? On top of it, we have to do a lot of work outside the school'. While showing his dissatisfaction Ramesh indicated the practical problems that the teachers were facing. He questioned the intention of the government and the school education department by raising the issue of simultaneous multi-grade teaching situations and the deployment of teachers for non-teaching tasks and I discuss these next.

Simultaneous multi-grade teaching

My discussions with the parents revealed their dissatisfaction regarding the learning level of their children as I illustrated in chapter 4. The girls in my research had fond memories of talking to friends, playing and shouting in school but not of learning. They saw school as a space for socializing and not learning. The parents who were aware of the lack of academic activities in the school complained about the teaching. For example Chanda said, 'they should learn more' when she talked about what her daughter had learnt in school. Her expectation was, 'they should be able to read a book'. The parents often mentioned 'no teaching' or 'teaching is not ok' (Mangu) to disclose their dissatisfaction. However, they had no idea of the reasons for this whereas the teachers gave a detailed account of the reasons why they were unable to teach in school. I saw simultaneous multi-grade teaching situations in all the three schools in my research. In the second village there was only one teacher though in the other two, there were two. One teacher implied that he had to teach all the five classes that the school had. In the schools where there were two teachers, each of them had to handle two or three classes at the same time. Although multi-grade teaching situations are also not entirely uncommon in industrialised countries such as Canada and England, they are adopted in developing countries due to necessity (Little, 2001). Though the government thinks that simultaneous multi-grade teaching is possible (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2008a), the teachers did not. Ramesh said:

> There are only two rooms and two teachers in the school, we keep the children of [grade] one and two in one room and the other three in another.

Even though the children are fewer in number[51], one teacher handling more than one class is really problematic. When we teach one class the children of the other classes remain unattended. We cannot teach all the classes at the same time, so they just sit like that.

Ghanshyam, who had to manage the entire school by himself, was in an even more disadvantageous position:

I am alone and am managing five classes in one go, so imagine my condition. Even though I wish to do more and better, I am unable to do so. If I teach one class then the children of the other classes shout. Is it possible to teach all five classes as one person?

Though the annual work plan and budget of the education department at the state level for the year 2008-09 aspires to having no single-teacher schools through the rationalization[52] of teachers, recruiting more teachers and by ensuring teachers' presence in school (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2008a: 100), the field realities did not match the rhetoric. In the three schools I looked at, one school had only one teacher posted. Although two teachers were in place in the other two, literally one teacher was found to run the school as teachers commonly take turns to be present in schools in rural areas. The state has yet to fulfil the promise that it made of having no single-teacher schools and ensuring teachers' presence in school though it recognises that not addressing the multi-grade and multi-level teaching situations in the classroom is one of the reasons for the low achievement of children (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2008a: 106). The low academic achievement of the students militates against their, more specifically girls', retention in school which was reflected in my sample. Simultaneous multi-grade teaching occurred in all the three villages and the inability of the teachers to manage such a state of affairs was clearly reflected in their accounts.

Although the teachers thought that managing more than one class was not possible, the state perceived this differently and believes that teachers can be prepared to face this by training them. Thus simultaneous multi-grade and multi-level teaching is an integral part

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[51]The number of children enrolled in the school was 62. During my visit to the school however, 33 children were present.

[52]To do away with the problem of single-teacher schools the state every year carries out a massive task before the onset of the new academic year called 'rationalisation of teachers'. Under this, surplus teachers of a school are transferred to schools with fewer teachers. Surplus teachers in a school are calculated on the basis of teacher-pupil ratio, i.e. 1:40. Though teachers are transferred officially, most of them do not join their new place of appointment and try to revoke their transfer order with the help of a public representative either through their personal contacts or by offering bribes. So it is not uncommon to find a school in an urban area with several teachers with a lower teacher-pupil ratio than the stipulated average and a school in a rural area where a single teacher has to struggle with three to five classes alone.

of the training programme that the state conducts. But ironically the teachers I interviewed did not sound very enthusiastic about these training programmes. They felt that their training was not enough to equip them for the classroom. Ramesh for instance said, 'Yes, some training was given, but that was not enough'. Though Ghanshyam initially approved of the training programme by saying, 'Training was ok, it was ok', his voice and manner of saying this did not match his words. On my insistence to know whether the training had helped him to manage his present situation, he ultimately came out with the truth:

> Ah … not much. They told us what we are doing already. They say to assign some task to other classes while teaching one class. But when we do that, children never concentrate on their task. If we are not with them they start talking, playing or fighting with each other. … So, you know, it is easy to say that it will work, but it never works.

Ghanshyam hinted at some of the practical problems teachers face whilst handling a multi-grade teaching situation. He also indicated the lack of basic infrastructure facilities in schools such as classrooms. He used 'we' to include his other friends in the same profession facing the same problem. These basic issues experienced by the teachers are not touched upon in training programmes that are aimed at improving students' achievement by making the teacher more competent.

Ramesh's statement was rather more direct:

> Training was given but it does not cover any practical aspects. They just give a theoretical lecture. I think they themselves have never handled more than one class and so do not know the practical problems that we face. They talk about arranging children in different circles and keeping children of different learning levels in different groups. Do we have enough space for that? We are not able to manage three classes and they speak about breaking them further into groups based on their learning levels. So … training and all goes on, they have to do it, so they do it, our problems remain the same.

As was made very clear by Ramesh, his training did not address the practical problems faced by teachers. He also used 'we' and not 'I' to indicate that this was not an individual issue. His account questioned the appropriateness of the training programme which did not help him and his fellow teachers as end users. His narration indicated that their

training made reference to multi-level[53] teaching along with multi-grade teaching. He seemed confused about the two concepts, even after undergoing the training programme. Multi-grade and multi-level teaching are highly technical and require tremendous amounts of competency, creativity and commitment from the teacher. When the teachers themselves only have a class 12 pass as their qualification, they may have weak knowledge of the subjects they teach, lack creativity and have relatively little commitment towards their profession. On the other hand the training programmes that should work as a bridge to fill the gap, do not adequately address the needs of these teachers. A single session of two and a half hours devoted to the discussion of a crucial professional practice like multi-grade and multi-level teaching is not enough. As a result the trainers, as suggested by Ramesh, just give a lecture without touching on practical aspects. As Aikman and Pridmore ask, '[c]an teachers be expected to change their conceptual framework for teaching and learning in the course of a few short in-service courses?' (2001: 533). The teacher trainers appeared not to have experienced the situation they lectured on. Thus they were in no position to address this properly during the training programme. This was highlighted by Ramachandran who pointed out that 'trainers who work with teachers are alienated from actual teaching' (2001b: 16). Thus the commitment of the organisers of the training and the state towards teachers' development was in question when Ramesh said 'they have to do it, so they do it'. Training emerged as a chore to be done, with little sense of the actual needs of the teachers.

A study on the effectiveness of multi-grade teaching conducted in Colombia highlighted the fact that educational qualifications or the 'university education of the teacher', 'the teacher living in the school', and 'higher teachers' pay', all contribute to the smooth functioning and success of multi-grade schools in terms of the academic achievement of the pupils (Psacharopoulos, Rojas and Velez, 1993: 274). In the absence of all this where teachers themselves are less qualified with only a higher secondary education, paid nominally for their work, combined with a low level of interest shown by parents in school-related matters, multi-grade teaching turns out to be a burden. All this may seem

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[53]Even within a mono-grade class there may be children with different levels of ability or pace of learning. This may pose a challenge to the teacher. Teachers are often advised to group children of similar learning pace and level together, that is to have several different groups within a mono-grade class. This of course was not followed by the teachers (as observed in my sample) who consider each class as one group as they already have two to three or sometimes even five classes to handle at the same time.

to have little to do with the issue of out-of-school girls but when one considers parents' sense of the poor provision offered by their local school and the teachers' struggles, it is not surprising that the parents did not put more emphasis on keeping their female children in school. Instead one might argue that it is surprising that they maintain their sons there, although as I indicated in chapter 4 it is also the case that parents can be keen to send their male children to private school - where they hope for better academic standards - if they have the means.

Deployment of teachers in non-teaching tasks

As in the case of teacher development, the availability of the teacher in the school was a concern the parents discussed (see chapter 4). They expressed their discontent with the absence of the teachers. For them, the availability of the teacher during school hours was crucial, since without him the entire process of schooling was adversely affected. The teachers themselves accepted these views expressed by the parents. They unanimously pointed out the fact that they were routinely deployed in non-academic tasks. Bhagchand for instance said:

> What can we do? We are normally overburdened with several tasks. We have to manage the school, give information to the department at the drop of a hat, keep record of several things, do surveys, go to meetings and training every now and then, I mean where is there time for teaching …?

He recounted all the tasks that a teacher has to do other than teaching and demonstrated the helplessness that the teachers felt. By recounting these tasks as distractions deflecting from his carrying out his real job, he in a way rejected the importance of even programmes such as training and meetings. Ramesh sounded relatively radical in his views regarding the deployment of teachers for non-teaching tasks. He said:

> We have a lot of file and register work to do too other than teaching, then the duty of census, polio vaccination, the government is making us, the teachers, work for all the departments. So we end up doing other things more than teaching. Yes, most of our time goes into conducting surveys and reporting to the higher offices.

Conducting surveys and reporting or furnishing information to higher offices was cited as the most time-consuming task by the teachers. They all felt that their services were made available by the government to other departments such as the health department at the expense of their own work.

Though there was a voice of protest, the teachers on the whole seemed to be simply following the instructions that were given to them, though with much difficulty. This emerged in Ghanshyam's account:

> And then managing the information, somehow I am doing all this because I have to do it but it is difficult to manage all this. They should make the teacher free to teach in the school and not to do information or survey work.

Unlike his counterparts, Ghanshyam focused on his own problems. As he was the only teacher in the school, his situation was particularly difficult. All my interviewees were of the opinion that teachers should be free to concentrate only on teaching. The government supposedly feels the same way, at least at a theoretical level. The annual work plan of the state for 2008-09 proclaims that the task to release teachers from non-academic activities was taken up in a campaign from October 2007 and the state ensured 'non-deployment of teachers in non-teaching tasks like the deployment of teachers in election-related works [such as] revision of electoral rolls, distribution of photo identity cards to voters, etc. or pulse polio etc.' (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2008a: 94). Unlike the claim made by the government department, all the teachers in my sample had a different experience that did not corroborate the state's declaration. During my fieldwork the teachers were engaged in election-related work such as the revision of the electoral lists. I found a board in front of all the schools I visited, displaying information that the revision of voters' lists was currently being undertaken. My discussion with the teachers revealed that there was an instruction to carry out this task in the school itself during school hours in conjunction with the usual school work. Although it was felt by the higher authorities that in this way the teachers were not taken away from the school and thereby apparently would do their own duties too, the teachers unsurprisingly felt differently.

The initial days of a school, after it reopens following the summer vacation, are full of activities - surveys of households to update the village education register, the enrolment of new entrants, the issuing of transfer certificates to students who have completed class five, the distribution of textbooks and so on, besides the foremost task of teaching. The teachers felt that their work was overtly disrupted by their additional duties as the appearance of a villager for the revision of the voters' list interrupted the ongoing activities in the school. Ramachandran, in her study in another state of India, found the same scenario and reported that 'the number and intensity of non-teaching duties of

teachers [such as] overseeing self-help groups, surveys and campaigns, human and cattle census has increased in the last five years' (2004b: 2). She argues that due to the engagement of teachers in non-teaching tasks the actual teaching days of the school are reduced to as little as 140 days in an academic year. Additionally, while arguing against the deployment of teachers in non-teaching tasks, Sadgopal mourns that:

> […] government school children will continue to make sacrifices for the sake of India's democracy when their teachers are engaged in frequent election duties, census work or educational surveys. (2008: 1)

In fact, the state has an Act passed in the field of elementary education called Madhya Pradesh *Janshiksha Adhiniyam*, 2002, the People's Education Act 2002, which in general prohibits the deployment of teachers in all non-academic tasks. According to the clause 10 of the Act:

> The State Government school teachers shall be deployed for academic and such other works which are the part of the management of the academic functioning of the school. They may be deployed for non academic work only on the specific order of the State Government. (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2002b: 804 (13))

As stipulated by the Act, to deploy teachers in non-teaching tasks, a prior order from the state government is mandatory. Without this the district or the sub-district level administrators have no power to assign teachers to non-academic tasks. In total violation of this Act, the teachers I interviewed were all engaged in different non-academic activities by the district and sub-district level administrators affecting the proceedings of their schools drastically. The state's campaign which started in 2007, five years after the enactment of the Act, to ensure this provision was in itself explicit that the provisions of the Act were not observed by the government officials themselves. Thus it was not surprising to see teachers doing non-academic tasks delegated to them by the district authority during their school hours. Consequently when I enquired about this particular Act in the state that prohibits engaging teachers in non-academic activities, Ramesh said:

> All the laws are there in this land but our condition is worse than a labourer. How will the law work? Letters … orders come from the collector of the district, the BEO[54] and the DEO[55] to do this and that, so we have to do it, otherwise they will take action against us.

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[54]BEO = Block education officer. He is the administrative head of the education department at the block level.
[55]DEO = District education officer. He is the administrative head of the education department of the district. He has authority over all the schools and teachers belonging to the school education department in the district.

The above account reveals the fact that teachers are at the bottom of a certain governmental power structure and feel obliged to carry out whatever function they have been ascribed. They find themselves with no authority to question the instruction coming from the district collector, the highest administrator of the district. As Ramesh said, 'Yes that is the reality … we are just made to follow the orders. We are expected to work and do miracles such as a hundred percent enrolment, attendance and very high level of achievement of children.' He referred to the goals of the SSA which aims at having all children in school and elementary education for all. The teachers thought that unrealistic objectives were framed for them to achieve with no support from the department; on top of that they were distracted by the administration from their goal by being deployed in tasks not related to their profession. The orders from the district education officer (DEO) and the block education officer (BEO) could not be set aside by teachers due to the fear that action would be taken against them. This also indicates the indifferent attitude of the state and district administration towards school education and puts a question mark on the intention and commitment of the state for achieving the goal of education for all.

The teachers also felt that their remuneration was not enough for the work they delivered. Like Ramesh, Ghanshyam pointed this out: 'They should increase the salary of Gurujis also, they are paying just Rs. 2500, is it possible to run a family with that amount these days? I have no problem, but think about others who have no other source of earning, how will they manage?' Very low remuneration was one of the major reasons of dissatisfaction amongst teachers. Another was the lack of value attached to their work. Ramesh said that this diminishing prestige was a factor which demoralised teachers and reduced their interest in the profession.

> Now-a-days the respect for teachers has been reduced. We are at the lowest end of the hierarchy who have to only listen and obey and have no power to do anything. There is no value in teaching these days. We are underpaid and the government treats us like a daily labourer. (Ramesh)

The heavy work load they had, the inadequate remuneration they received, the pressure of work they had combined with their inability to perform due to their own poor educational background, the apathetic and non-cooperative attitude of the administration and their sense of a deteriorating status in society, all worked towards their under-performance by making them less interested in the task they were engaged in.

The status of teachers in the community

As indicated in chapter 4, my discussions with the parents showed that the teachers were not regular, not punctual and did not do much teaching. The teachers claimed that even though they were willing to teach in the school they were unable to do so due to the pressure of non-teaching activities. They blamed the administration for overburdening them with non-school and non-teaching related work. The teachers felt that due to this, their position in the community and society in general had diminished over a period of time. Interestingly, however, though they thought that there was an erosion of the status of the teacher in society as a whole, they felt that their own relation with the local community was unaffected and they were successful in holding their reputation. For example, Ghanshyam said: 'My relation with them is very good, I know everyone of them, I am from the same village so I know them from the very beginning.' Though Ghanshyam did not explain what he meant by 'good', he thought he was in an advantageous position as he knew all the villagers from his childhood. To my question whether the villagers respected him as a teacher, he replied, 'Yes, they do. The elderly people treat me as their child, they have seen me right from childhood.' Although he said 'yes' to getting respect from the villagers, his latter statement that the elderly members of the village treated him as their own child did not seem to corroborate exactly what he claimed. My discussion with the villagers too offered a very different image (page: 139).

Like Ghanshyam, Ramesh held the view that his relation with the local community was good. According to him, 'They respect and listen to us. If I say something they say yes, never say no to me even though I know that they are not going to follow what I say but at least they listen to me.' He had no clue why the villagers did not follow his words. Rather, he was relatively satisfied with the fact that the villagers at least listened to him. Though he was pretty sure that they did not follow what he said, he thought, in an environment where teachers in general have no respect, his own status was rather better. Like his counterparts, Bhagchand was very confident about his relation with the local community that he served:

> They do respect me, they respect the teacher, they touch the feet of the teacher. My relation with them is like a family relation. I try to help them in whatever way I can.

His claim that 'they rely on me for small help, bank work, filling in forms, things like that, whatever they do not understand they come to me', was substantiated when a woman consulted him regarding her ration card[56] during our visit to her house. The villagers depended on the teacher to carry out work that involved reading or writing as they themselves were either illiterate or just literate. Their dependency on the teacher made them respect him as a knowledgeable person. But this dependency of villagers did not seem to translate into abiding by what the teacher said regarding the education of their daughters. Bhagchand gave a reason for this lack of connection between respecting him and adhering to what he said. According to him: 'They listen, they never say no to me, but as soon as they drink and lose their sense, then they forget everything.'

Bhagchand here referred to the habit of alcohol consumption among male members of the community. His account confirmed the village's patriarchal structure and that the decision-making power lies with the male members of the family. At the same time his statement and similar accounts by his counterparts revealed the fact that the teachers were not in a position to influence the minds, hearts or action of the villagers. For this they gave reasons such as the forgetfulness of the villagers after the consumption of alcohol as in the case of Bhagchand or not being ready to accept change as in case of Ghanshyam who said, 'they do not want to accept any change, they are happy with the life that they have'.

Maybe the teachers tried to save their face by saying that they were respected by the villagers. They seemed not very keen to work at this as gaining the respect of the community involves higher levels of dedication to work and depends upon the amount of credibility they establish for themselves. In the absence of a trustworthy relation between the teacher and the community, where the teacher did not bother about what villagers think of him and when villagers did not approve of the behaviour of the teacher, it was not surprising to find a significant number of out-of-school girls in the village.

Belonging to the same village and living in the village had not helped Ghanshyam in any way to gain the villagers' confidence or influence them. The villagers demonstrated the

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[56]Ration cards are provided to families below the poverty line. This card allows them to procure provisions with a nominal price from a fair price shop.

distance between themselves and Ghanshyam. This distance was due to the higher social and economic status of the latter. As the teacher was the son of the *Patel* of the village they thought it safe to maintain a distance from him and not to interfere in matters of the school. Thus the bond between the community and the school/teacher seemed not to be developed which is crucial for villagers having confidence in the school to which they send their daughters. Even where the relation between the teacher and the community was well established, as in case of Bhagchand, it did not place the teacher in an influential position. This may be indicative of the fact that though the teachers claimed that they had a good relation and had gained the confidence of the villagers, in actual practice they lacked a working relation with the community and were yet to establish the credibility to have any influence on them. Thus the teachers were in no position to persuade parents in favour of girls' education.

The participation of the community in school-related matters

This lack of bonding between the school/teacher and the community resulted in an indifferent attitude towards each other. For the teachers, it was easy to work in isolation without encouraging community participation in the school. Though the school system has supposedly promoted an open-door policy in recent years that encourages parents and the larger community to participate and take an active role in the affairs of the school, the field findings did not match that rhetoric. The Madhya Pradesh Janshiksha Adhiniyam, 2002 and the related rules called Madhya Pradesh Janshiksha Niyam, 2003 demand the establishment of a parent-teacher association (PTA) in every government and government-aided school providing elementary education. According to clause 12 of the Act, 'In every school there shall be a [p]arent [t]eacher association' (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2002b: 804 (13)). The philosophy behind such a provision is to encourage and increase community participation and ownership in the management of schools. In accordance with the provisions of the Act, parent-teacher associations were supposedly formed in each and every government school of Madhya Pradesh. These consist of the parents of the students enrolled in the school and all the teachers posted in the concerned school. The head teacher acts as the secretary of the association while the president and the vice-president are elected from among the members of its executive body. The provisions of the Act make it mandatory to have an association meeting at least once every month. Several rights and responsibilities are bestowed upon the PTA by

the Act – among them to ensure one hundred percent enrolment in the school of all children in the age group 5 to 14 years of the habitation, to ensure the regular attendance of teachers and students in the school, to 'monitor the academic and financial status of the school' (sub-clause 'z' of clause 9 of Madhya Pradesh Janshiksha Niyam 2003), to 'inform the Education Committee in rural areas and Administrative Officer of urban local body in urban areas to take disciplinary action against the teachers who are irresponsible towards their duties' (sub-clause 'w' of clause 9 of Madhya Pradesh Janshiksha Niyam 2003) and to operate the accounts of the school (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2003: 13).

In total contrast to the provisions of the Act and the rules, my research revealed that these PTAs were formed and run only on official papers. They were not functional in any true sense in the schools I visited. The majority of the parents (19 out of 24) I interviewed were unaware of the existence of such an association in their village school. Though the mothers of the pupils have equal status to the fathers as PTA members, none of them were aware of the existence of such an association. Ramachandran and Saihjee (2002) in their study conducted in six states of India also found no evidence of women members' participation in such school level bodies called village education committee (VEC). They also report that most of the VEC members were not aware of their role in the VEC. In my research those few fathers who had an idea of the PTA did not associate themselves much with it.

The teachers on the other hand had a different story to tell. Ramesh said, 'A PTA … is there, it is just there'. But as Bhagchand put it, 'The PTA is there just for the name's sake', and Ghanshyam said, 'A PTA is there, but no parents come if we call them for a meeting.' All the teachers, irrespective of their closeness to or distance from the community, held a similar view that though the PTA had been formed, it was of no use to them as it did not support them in any way. Though Ghanshyam lamented that he had a lot of responsibilities that were beyond managing single-handedly, apparently he, and indeed none of the teachers, made a sincere effort to involve the PTA in their school affairs. This was evident in Ghanshyam's account when he used 'we' to include his other teacher colleagues in general though he was the only teacher in his school. The teachers

assumed that the villagers' lack of interest in the school was the reason for their non-involvement of the PTA. As Ghanshyam said:

> They have no time for the school. They think the teacher is there to see to everything, why should they come, after all it is the government school. The president of the PTA also is least bothered, he does not know what is going on in the school. They think why take on the headache of the school?

His assertion reconfirmed the distance between the school/teacher and the local community. It was possibly easy for the teachers to make the excuse that the villagers did not have time or that they did not take any interest in the school as it is owned by the government. They also gave the reason that as the education of children was their least priority, the parents did not bother to get involved in school affairs: 'They are not interested, their priorities are different' (Bhagchand).

In contrast to the teachers' views, the parents were of the opinion that they did not know much about the PTA and its function. For example, Bhima spoke of the *Gram Sabha*, the village-level decision-making body to discuss and look after the welfare of the village, when I asked about the PTA. He had knowledge of only one committee in the village - the *Gram Sabha*. When I explained to him about the PTA he said, 'Nothing like that is there in our village'. And Bhuri was rather surprised and asked, 'Meeting? No, why would they [school] call us for a meeting?', when I asked about PTA meetings. She thought there was no reason why the school should invite them for a meeting irrespective of the fact that two of her children were in the school. This meant that she was in principle a member of the PTA. The accounts of these parents reflected their unawareness regarding the existence of the PTA in their village school. Even Choksingh, who himself had served as the president for one year previously, did not have much idea of the role of the PTA. For him, distributing textbooks to students in the first week of the academic year was the duty of the president. The fact that his own daughter dropped out after class one, revealed that neither the president nor the PTA had any idea of their roles and responsibilities towards the school.

The parents felt that the school was the domain of the teacher. As they considered themselves socially, educationally and economically inferior to the teacher, they thought it better to keep a distance from the school, thus limiting the interaction between parents

and teachers. The teachers took advantage of this situation and did not do much to involve the parents, possibly for fear of losing their own authority, such as it was, over the villagers and the resources of the school. For them keeping their distance from the villagers and not involving them in the day-to-day management of the school was a defence mechanism. After all, no teacher would like the idea of the PTA members controlling them by asking questions regarding financial matters such as the funds received and the expenditure of the school or their own coming late or remaining absent from the school. Thus the limited interest shown by the villagers which was based on a lack of awareness of their roles and responsibilities came as a boon for the teachers. Consequently, the teachers showed no interest in disseminating information pertaining to the school, more specifically financial issues and the rights and responsibilities of the PTA. Thus the meetings which were supposed to be held at least once every month became mostly fictitious with nobody turning up or just very few who simply listened to the teacher informing them about the school and the students. No real and meaningful interaction took place between teachers and parents as the teachers tended to have no interest to engage in a discourse with the parents.

Leclercq's (2003) study[57] conducted in another two districts of Madhya Pradesh corroborates my data. He found that most of the VECs[58] and SMCs[59] were dysfunctional owing to the fact that the villagers regarded the school as the government's and did not consider taking an interest in its improvement. Leclercq argues that:

> However, it would be misleading to blame only parents for the deficiencies of school management institutions, while teachers' behaviour is so central to the deficiencies of the schools themselves. … [T]eachers, one of whom is (statutorily) secretary of the committee, have no interest in parents controlling them, hence the tendency not to inform parents of the dates of meetings […]. (2003: 1864)

This state of affair highlights the existence of a distance between the teacher and the local community. This distance paradoxically could not be removed even after recruiting local teachers belonging to the same community or locality. Though they belong to the same

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[57]The fieldwork for this study was conducted in 2002.
[58]The village education committee (VEC) is a village-level body to supervise and guide the committees at school level.
[59]The school management committees (SMCs) were formed in alternative schools which were replaced by PTAs and were given statutory power after the enactment of the Madhya Pradesh Janshiksha Adhiniyam, 2002.

locality, the teachers had less regard for the community because of their own higher social and economic status. The views of the teachers about the customary practices in the community they serve is thus crucial as it either enables or distracts them from achieving the goal that all children, more specifically, all girls should be in school. In the next section, I shall discuss the views that the teachers held regarding the parents of out-of-school girls and the community in relation to their own work.

The teachers' perception of the community dynamics

The principle behind recruiting local teachers was to reduce the distance of the teachers' residence from their work place. It was also intended to reduce the social distance between the teacher and the community. However, my field experience did not support this rhetoric. Though Ghanshyam belonged to the same village, he was from a family of higher social and economic status than the villagers. Bhagchand and Ramesh too were from a higher caste than the majority of the villagers. Ramesh commuted from the block head quarter, whereas Bhagchand resided in the adjacent village. Thus, though in the case of Ghanshyam and Bhagchand the physical distance to the school had been reduced, the social distance still persisted. The teachers often said 'these villagers', 'they' or 'these parents' to denote community members. This was indicative of their distancing themselves from the community they served.

Two of the teachers sounded defensive while talking about status of out-of-school girls in the village. They did not feel at ease with revealing the number of out-of-school girls in their village. Ramesh for instance said:

> There will be around five to six girls who are not enrolled in the school at this moment, but they will come now. This is the time for enrolment so we are expecting that these girls will be in school by the end of this month. Except these few girls, all others are enrolled in school.

Though he admitted that there were girls not enrolled in the school, his statement, 'we are expecting', made it clear that until then there had been no attempt from the teachers to bring these girls to school. Even though fifteen days had already passed since the schools reopened, he did not appear to have initiated the process of engaging in any dialogue with the parents of these girls. Rather he preferred to just wait and watch. Ghanshyam's

expression too did not reflect any seriousness when he said that there were around three to four girls in this category.

Bhagchand had a rather definite figure to share. He was aware of the girls who had dropped out, who were never enrolled in school and those who were very irregular in their attendance. Unlike Bhagchand, Ghanshyam denied having any girls who were enrolled but not attending school. He said, 'No, there are no such children.' When I shared with him the name of two such girls in the village that I had met, he said in a rather casual tone: 'Yes, there may be one or two like this but all others are coming. Some children are not very regular, they do not come in between for say four days or so.'

He clearly did not want to discuss the actual scenario and maybe he himself was not aware of the exact number of girls who were out of school. Ramesh too talked vaguely about girls who were enrolled officially but were not attending school:

> Umm, yes, there are a few of them like that. Their names are there in the school but they go for work, their parents say they will come to the school today, tomorrow but they never come. Some of them come for two days and remain absent for fifteen to twenty days.

The teachers in two of the villages had no idea of the number of girls who did not attend school although they undertook an annual survey to assess and update the educational status of the children in the concerned habitation. This raises questions about the purpose and conduct of such surveys which are meant to cover each and every household of the state. It also reflects the triviality attached to the outcome of the survey and the survey itself by the teachers. Teachers furnish data to their higher offices regarding out-of-school children and the strategy they adopt to bring in such children but they sound vague while talking about it. This may be indicative of the fact that the teachers tend to fill in the registers provided by the higher authorities rather mechanically and do not attach any value to them. Any professional ethos seemed to be completely missing.

In our discussion on the reasons why some of the girls were still not in school, Ramesh mentioned in a generic way that, 'Some of them are sick, others have some family problems, there are girls who do not want to come out of their homes. There are girls whose brain is not very developed so they cannot study.' Though there were no girls in

the category of mental retardation in that particular village, Ramesh's mention of this as a reason for girls remaining out of school indicated that he was talking in general, not focusing on his own experience in the village. When asked to concentrate on the village he served, he said:

> The parents do not bother, they put girls to work, they take girls with them for work. They are not interested in education, so they are not sending, but there are very few of them like that.

In all probability, for Ramesh, having a few out-of-school girls, as he put it, was not a matter of concern. This was reflected in his voice. He further elaborated the reasons why some of the girls were not in school or were not attending even if they were enrolled in the school.

> They are like that, these villagers are mostly illiterate, they do not understand the importance of education, they keep the girls in the house to work, take care of the younger siblings or take them for work in the field. Now this is the season for agricultural work so you will find most of them absent from the school. Children get plenty of work this time and they can earn in between Rs. 25 to Rs. 30, so why should they come here? They better go where they get money. Money is everything for them, beyond that they do not understand the value of education.

Ramesh pointed to the illiteracy status of the villagers as one reason why they were not able to attach value to the education of their children. On the other hand, he, in a way approved the act of the villagers engaging their children in waged labour to earn money. He himself thought there was no point in children coming to school when there was an opportunity to earn. This was reflected in his account when he said, 'Why should they come here?' Though he blamed the villagers by saying that money, and not education, was everything to them, he seemed to be permissive about their attitude towards the education of their wards.

Ghanshyam shared these views. He, too, thought that the villagers did not value the education of their children as they themselves were illiterate. He said:

> The parents of this village are not at all interested in sending their children to school, they are not even sending their boys regularly, never mind the girls. They do not bother about education, they are bothered about their work and house. … Villagers are very poor too, so go for work in the morning and come back in the evening so they do not have time for all this, education is their least priority.

His account affirmed the fact that for teachers, illiteracy and the low economic status of the villagers were the reasons for them not showing any interest in the education of their daughters. The teachers gave the impression that these two were the only reasons why girls were not attending school.

Unlike his counterparts, Bhagchand appeared to be more thoughtful and analytical in his approach. His account revealed the family dynamics and the social structures that prevent girls from attending school. Though he too accused the parents as his friends had done, it was for a different reason and he drew a broader picture of the problem.

> These parents do not understand at all that if they are sending the boys they should send the girls too. They do not understand, if they have two girls then they will keep one of them definitely at home for the housework. For fetching water, collecting firewood, cooking, all the things that only girls do, boys will never do them. Girls obey parents and do whatever parents tell them to do. So … parents make them do the work which is assigned to girls or women in our society from time immemorial. They are poor also, they go for work so they leave the girls in the house to take care.

He indicated the differential treatment children get from their parents based on their gender. His account also revealed the gendered process of socialization in which girls learn to be submissive and obedient. According to him, taking care of the house and domestic work are allocated to girls. Though he subtly mentioned the poor financial status of the parents, he stressed the gendered role division in society by stating that in the absence of the parents the girls are left to take care of the house. To reaffirm his stand regarding the existence of gender role stereotypes in society he further said:

> No, not the financial condition …, that is not the main problem, the main thing is their attitude, they want the girls to take care of the younger children, girls do that perfectly, they feed them and keep them nicely, if they say this to boys, they never do that, they will go here and there, that is why they rely on girls.

Unable to critique the socialization process in the family and in society that prepares girls to take up domestic tasks and replace their mothers whenever necessary, he thought girls had the innate ability to do so and hence parents could count on them. The latter part of his statement where he tried to take a firm stand against the economic reasons that keep girls out of school, was contradicted by the former when he mentioned, 'they are poor also'. Despite a certain degree of contradiction in his statement, he saw the inter-

relationship between poverty, the need for parents to use their daughters to manage households, and gendered socialization.

In total contrast to Bhagchand, Ghanshyam was of the opinion that owing to their poverty the parents were not in a position to value the education of their children. He said very categorically:

> See, the children who come to this school belong to parents who are very poor, daily wage labourers, they do not see any value in the education of their children. They have no money, children of poor families only come to the government school. So after a few years parents withdraw their girls to send them for work.

Though Ghanshyam did not explain why he thought that only children from poor economic backgrounds come to government schools, he probably was aware of the fact that parents, if capable of paying the fee, prefer to send their children to private schools as they have lost faith in the delivery system of government schools. Instead of trying to probe into this aspect of the problem, he was satisfied with his assumption that as the parents were poor, they did not value education. Or, possibly, he thought it was better to point the finger at the parents and he did this in defence of himself. He reiterated his stance by saying that the parents 'are like that, they want their children to earn from a very young age. Girls will always be engaged in work so they have no time to come to school or study.' Though he seemed to have some insight into the community dynamics and its effect on girls' education, his observation based on a long association with the community helped him to say:

> Yes, most of them work. When they are small they come to school, the parents send them to the school but when they grow up then the parents send them to the field or other places to work. After class four or five, parents think a girl has become very big and stop her coming to school. Poor girls, what will they do, they have to follow their parents.

Ghanshyam's observation regarding engaging grown-up girls in wage-earning activities was substantiated by Bhagchand to some extent, when he said:

> They send only the small girls to the school, once girls are grown up then they will not send them. So many girls are there, I tell you, Mamta and Sapna, they were very good in study but after class three their parents stopped their coming. Sixty percent of the girls of this village do not go up to class five even. They start herding goats, collecting firewood and bringing water. This is the condition here. Once they are big, they [parents] put them to work and

earning and after two to three years, marriage and send girls to the in-laws. This is what they know.

Bhagchand depicted a rather clear picture of the association between the girls' age and the activities they engage in. According to him while very young, girls attended school, but as soon as they were considered to be big enough to entrust tasks to, they were engaged in chores in and around the house. The instant this phase was over and the girls grew a bit older, they started earning for the family and finally, they were sent to their in-laws a couple of years later. His understanding of the interplay of the age of the girls and their positioning in the family corroborated the parents' views as discussed in chapter 5.

Hinting at the cultural and social positioning of girls and women in the society and the associated expectation, Ramesh said:

> They still think girls are there to do the housework, they are the property of their in-laws. They have to be obedient, be kept in the house and protected. They still think very traditionally, you know, girls are for the house and boys are for outside work. They consider girls as burden and do not want to spend on them. Now-a-days in the school everything is provided to girls, that is why they are sending girls. If they had to invest even a little, then I think, they would not send.

Though he initially expressed the view that the parents were poor and in need of money which made them ignore the need of education for their daughters, eventually he threw some light on the traditional values that the community adheres to. Presumably, here he was referring to the category of parents who were sending their daughters to school and according to him it was because of the incentives provided in the school and not because parents valued education *per se*. Maybe for him, parents who were not sending their daughters to school fell into the category that was more traditional or not attracted by the incentives as they could earn more from wage labour.

Bhagchand held a very different view from Ramesh regarding the incentives provided to promote girls' education. He said:

> They are not very much interested in the dress [uniforms] or books. Those who have concern about their children, they send them if you do not give a uniform. But there are people whom you give three to four pairs of uniforms but they will not come, they will take all that and will not come to the school. They do not bother much for the incentives.

He divided the parents into two different categories, ones who had 'concern' and the others who had 'no concern' for the education of their children. According to him, the incentives provided in school did not attract either of these. He further explained why the incentives did not catch the attention of the latter by saying that, 'See, they can earn more than what they get in the school if they are working, so why should they bother?' Ghanshyam too joined Bahgchand in this though he held a slightly different view regarding incentives as a whole. He said:

> Incentives are good, parents like that their children are eating in school, they are getting free textbooks and girls are getting uniforms but when girls grow up they are more attracted by the money they are getting through them. If the girl goes for work then she will earn at least Rs. 30 per day, bigger girls get Rs. 70. So that is more valuable for them, not the education.

In a way Ghanshyam substantiated what Bhagchand had mentioned earlier – parents send girls to school when they are small and put them to work in wage labour as soon as they grow older. When girls were small, aged seven or eight, the parents viewed school as the best place to leave them during their absence from home or as Bhagchand put it, 'They send the smaller children to the school so that they will not be troubled in the house'. Although all three teachers valued the importance of these incentives to some extent, they agreed that they had not proved pivotal in bringing and retaining children, especially girls, in school.

This was imbricated in the differential treatment boys and girls get in the family and community. Ramesh pointed out the preference for sons:

> You see, they will always wait for a boy to come even after they have four or even seven daughters. Till they get a boy, they will keep on producing. After getting a boy they will try to have another boy. So the mentality is like that, it is still remaining like that whatever you do. Now-a-days everybody is saying that there is no difference between boys and girls, but they just say that, they do not observe that, they do not follow or understand that. It is an age-old practice in our society and will not go that easily.

When mentioning parents' preference for sons, which affects girls' education (Kingdon, 2002 and Schultz, 2001), Ramesh sounded a little critical of the practice, but his line that 'it is an age-old practice in our society and will not go that easily' was indicative of his conviction that change is a slow process. Bhagchand picked up this thread. He explained why sons are preferred over daughters:

> Yes, they treat them differently. The usual practice of our society, boys are different, girls will be at home and will not go out once they are grown up. They will be made to do all the work, boys enjoy their life. Parents think, she has to go to her in-laws so they give more importance to the boys.

Bhagchand indicated the consequence of the patri-local system of marriage which positioned girls disadvantageously in their family. He also pointed out the division of labour where domestic activities are considered the domain of girls and women, whereas boys and men enjoy being free from these responsibilities. Ghanshyam added another dimension to this when he said:

> The mentality of the parents is like that. For them boys are everything, even though the boy is not taking any care of them in old age, they will prefer boys to girls. The thinking that boys are the support during old age, and after their death they are the ones who do all the rituals, makes them take good care of their boys. Girls, on the other hand, go to their in-laws after they grow up, they are considered to be burdens as parents have to spend for the dowry for their marriage.

As mentioned by Ghanshyam, the notion that sons not only reside with the parents but they are the ones who perform the rituals for their parents after their death was very strong amongst the villagers and an important reason for preferring a son. According to Hindu religion it is the duty of the son to perform the last rites after the death of his parents without which the soul cannot achieve *Mokhya*, or be liberated from this world (Kakar, 1988). Mingled with this perception, the dowry that parents have to provide at the time of the marriage of a girl, made them to consider girls as burdens. These practices work against the education of girls by putting them into the category of financially burdensome and socially unequal members of society.

As made clear by Ghanshyam, girls' future role in their in-laws' households makes parents keep them at home to become skilled at the tasks they have to accomplish.

> They [girls] have to do all the work in the house and take care of the family members just like their mother does. They want to send the girls to their in-laws as early as possible. Marriages are fixed here at a very early age and as soon as a girl is big she is sent to her in-laws. Yes, the practice of early marriage and the thinking that she will go to her in-laws is the main reason. When the girl becomes big the only task of the family is to prepare her for the in-laws' house. So they stop her coming to school.

In addition to that future role envisaged for girls, the safety of grown-up, that is adolescent, girls was a concern for the parents that the teachers recognised. Ramesh

considered that parents think 'very traditionally' and view the world as unsafe for grown-up girls:

> Yes, they do not send the grown-up girls. They are afraid of sending girls to school if it is a little distance from the village. If the school is located in one corner of the village then the girls residing in the far off corner will not come. As soon as the girl is a little grown up they will build walls around her, she is not allowed to go to school or in that case anywhere. Girls can go out only with them. For labour also the father or mother or the relatives will go with them.

Ramesh highlighted the apprehension that parents have regarding the safety of their daughters. The fear that something untoward would happen to their daughter on her way to or from school acted as a force to keep them at home.

None of the teachers, unsurprisingly, mentioned parents' fear regarding girls getting abused or harassed at school. A few studies on this, conducted in different parts of the world, suggest that parents tend to withdraw their daughters from school for fear of sexual abuse (Global Campaign for Education, 2005; Levine, Lloyd, Greene *et al*., 2008). In their study in Africa, Mgalla, Schapink and Boerma (1998) for example, found that three-fourth of their respondents (girls in primary schools) were approached by the boys in school to have sex with them, whereas nine percent of the respondents were bothered by a teacher for the same (also see Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, and Ellsberg, *et al*. 2005; 2006; Jewkes, Levin, and Mbananga, *et al*. 2002). The Human Rights Watch (2001) report recognized the bitter truth that girls experience sexual harassment and abuse in school by their teachers and fellow students. Additionally, the Amnesty International (2008) report established that sexual harassment of girls in school is a global phenomenon. The report discussed the findings of two separate studies conducted in the USA and in Malawi. According to the report, 83 percent of girls in USA had an experience of sexual harassment in school by their teachers and male students, whereas in Malawi, 50 percent of the girls reported having the same experience.

When asked why parents did not feel school where they were in the company of other girls and there was a teacher to take care of them was a safe place for their daughters, Ghanshyam said:

> They know all that but there is a tendency to keep girls in the house after they grow up. They restrict girls from doing things. When they are small they do

not do all that but when the girl grows up then it starts. Here, in this area the environment is not that good, girls are not very safe to go out alone even during the afternoon as the roads are deserted at that time. So parents think it is better to keep them at home.

The teachers observed complete silence concerning parents' views on the safety of girls in school. They tried to draw attention to the parents' concern about the safety and protection of the girls on their way to and from school. In contrast, the issue of the safety of the girls in school was mentioned by most of the parents I interviewed. As discussed in chapter 5, they talked about safety issues regarding the girls in and on the way to school. Concerns regarding 'girls going out alone', 'safety on the way to school' and 'remaining for long in the company of boys in school' were commonly mentioned by the parents. Though teachers also mentioned the first two they failed to recognise, or maybe purposefully concealed, the third aspect completely. This indicates the way in which teachers possibly tried to keep themselves away from any controversies. Subsequently, maybe in order to avoid discussions about parents' concern regarding the safety of their daughters in school, the teachers very efficiently diverted the direction of our discussion towards issues pertaining to societal norms. Ghanshyam for instance, said:

> If somebody is sending, then others will tease him, they will say, 'why are you sending your grown-up daughter? What do you want her to do? If something bad happens with her what will you do, where will she go? Then you have to repent for the rest of your life.' The parents who were a little bit willing, they also got afraid and kept their daughters in the house.

As evident from his account, though Ghanshyam indicated parents' dismay towards the possibility of something happening to their daughters if they come to school, he left the issue of what might happen and how it might happen fuzzy. Rather, he twisted his narration towards the tendency of the parents to act in line with rest of the villagers and the peer-pressuring attitude prevalent amongst them.

Along with certain traditional values and the safety concerns of parents, the job market as well added to the problem of educating girls. As Bhagchand put it:

> They think why send girls to school? What will they do? They cannot compete with the elite group, they do not have that much money to provide higher education for girls and they know that with little education they cannot get any job. So they think why waste time in school, let them go for work and earn money.

Girls' future job prospects after elementary education, the level provided free by the government, was raised by Bhagchand. With the job market shrinking every day and getting a job becoming tougher, parents were aware that the mere completion of elementary education would not yield a job for their daughter. At the same time, the home-maker role of girls and women in a patriarchal system demanded the early departure of girls from the biological family to join their in-laws. Thus parents had the perception that if a girl gets a job after completing her education, it would be when she left for her in-laws and as a consequence the fruits would be enjoyed by them, not the natal parents. Consequently, the parents had the tendency of avoiding what they considered a lost investment. As education beyond class five is directly linked with getting a job and nothing else, according to Bhagchand, the parents are inclined to opt for engaging their daughters in wage-earning activities which assures financial gain for them. This inclination of parents towards financial gain obviously hampers girls' education.

Though the cultural values and practices remain unchanged to a considerable extent in this area, the teachers could feel a certain amount of change taking place amongst the villagers. All of them mentioned the changing attitudes of the parents and the community though they had different experiences and views. Ghanshyam thought that parents' mind-set towards girls had changed but within age-related parameters. He said:

> Yes, there is a change in their attitude towards girls, but it is towards the young girls. When they are small they are considered like any other child but when they grow a little they are considered to be just like a woman. They have to be in the house, dress differently, and their behaviours are watched very closely by the elders of the family. These villagers are still untouched by modern culture and it will take a long time to change their outlook.

Ghanshyam's account underlined the complex view of parents regarding the education of their daughters. The proximity of the school to the residence of the girls, the incentives provided by the school and the social demand to be literate had resulted in altering the standpoint of the parents to send their girls to school but only when they were very young, that is aged seven or eight. Nevertheless, there is a social and economic dimension as pointed out by the parents themselves, and which I discussed in the preceding chapter. At a very young age girls cannot be entrusted with any major tasks such as taking care of the younger siblings unless there are adverse familial circumstances, and thus young girls are free to attend school where they can get their meal at noon time free. The parents

seemed to allow younger girls to be in school to avoid any bother for themselves at home as pointed out by Bhagchand. But they did not want to take any chances concerning the sexuality of the girls as they grow up. As girls proceeded on their journey towards adulthood, engaging them in economic and non-economic activities along with their safety concerns took precedence over any other issues.

The parents' behaviour and attitudes towards girls' education was also dependent on the cost and opportunity available to girls after study. Ghanshyam recognised both the changed and unchanged approach of the parents towards young and adolescent girls respectively; nonetheless he failed to understand the complex interrelations that underlie this. Bhagchand as well felt change amongst the parents but had a different view from Ghanshyam. According to him:

> The social practice, the culture and the customary attitude of the older generation have not changed at all. They still think the same way and act the same way. But yes, the younger generation is behaving differently. The children whom I taught nine – ten years ago, though they dropped out because of their parents, they, who are married and have their own children now, want to send their children to school. That much change is there in the new generation.

Bhagchand gave the impression of being optimistic regarding change in society. He sounded very firm in his belief that the new generation would educate their children. His claim was in fact substantiated by one of the girls in my research. Radha said:

> We will send them, I will not make my daughter work. I will send her to school. I will send them, … if parents are sending, then why will children not study? For girls they say, why give the fee for them, but I will do the labour and send them to school. If my husband is not giving, then I will do everything.

Radha's assertion made clear what Bhagchand wanted to articulate. Though according to Bhagchand, there was no chance that the older generation could be changed, the hope lies with the younger generation. But whether girls such as Radha could fight against the age-old practices in their society or would succumb to male dominance in the long run remained unclear.

Unlike Bhagchand and Ghanshyam, Ramesh was full of confusions and contradictions regarding parents' attitudinal changes towards girls' education. He said:

Yes, things have changed now, people are seeing the outside world. Previously they were not going out of their village but now they go out and see the world beyond their village, they see children going to school, working in offices, so now they also want their children to be like that. Their perception is changing, now parents are willing to send their daughters too to school but it will take some more time to bring all the girls to school.

According to Ramesh, the mobility of the villagers to nearby towns in search of work and other related activities had helped in exposing them to the changing scenario which they wanted to adopt for themselves. He thought that owing to this exposure some of the parents were sending their daughters to school. Nonetheless, he had no clue why others were still untouched by the urban influence that he mentioned. He was full of uncertainties regarding parents' perception of girls' education. At the initial stage of the interview he held the view that 'parents do not understand the importance of education'. His use of 'these villagers' showed that he included the entire village community in this category of 'not understanding the importance of education'. As the interview proceeded further, he suggested that the change process had already begun and parents were now eager to send their daughters to school but eventually he said:

You were asking about importance of studying, they understand it, they understand the value of education very well but they think if the girl is doing labour she can earn, so why send her to school?

This same teacher had previously said that the parents did not attach any value to education. He thus articulated a certain contradiction that prevailed in his own understanding of the issue.

As illustrated in the above discussion, in spite of a certain degree of contradictions that the teachers possessed in their understanding of the community, they highlighted the issues of gender stereotypes, preference given to boys at the cost of girls, the prevalence of the patriarchal and patri-local system and the low value attached to girls' education due to the illiteracy of the parents as well as poverty and community pressure as some of the reasons for keeping the girls away from school. This makes one curious about what the teachers actually did to counter these barriers that militate against the education of girls and I discuss this in the following section.

Initiatives by the teachers to promote girls' education

The initiatives if any, taken by the teachers to promote girls' education, were in a way embedded in the perception they had of the community, their own commitment towards the issue and how far they considered this as part of their duties. The three teachers I interviewed displayed diverse approaches towards this issue. Ghanshyam was defensive. He wanted to convey that despite the fact that he did everything, it was the passivity of the community which was to be blamed. He said:

> I am trying to do my best to bring all the children to the school, I talked to them, tell the children to talk to their parents, send letters to them, I am trying always. I am doing whatever I can do for the school and for bringing the girls to the school. But the parents also should think about their children and send them to school.

His repetitive mention that he did everything he could, revealed his desire to be seen to be doing his job. The viability of the initiatives he mentioned, specifically writing letters to parents and talking to them through the children, must be in question. He seemed never to give it a thought how parents who themselves were illiterate would read a letter sent by him to persuade them to send their daughters to schools. The children's ability to talk to their parents and convince them on such a crucial matter also appeared unlikely in a society where children hold no agency in front of their parents, especially the father, the main decision-maker of the family. Last but not the least, the fact that he had not contacted the parents whose daughters had dropped out from school since the previous year as in the case of Balu, indicated the opposite of what he claimed.

Bhagchand who appeared to be the most sincere among the three teachers I interviewed, also did not sound very ardent on this issue. His first reaction to my query about the initiatives he had taken, resembled Ghanshyam's to a considerable extent. He said, 'Yes I have done a lot of things, such as writing slogans on the wall'. Similar to Ghanshyam, he also probably failed to visualise the impact of written messages on the target group who were illiterate themselves. When asked about the feasibility of this attempt, he himself sounded doubtful of its impact on the parents. He said:

> No, other than that we have taken out rallies, there was the order from the higher authority also for that. We went to their houses and contacted them, wherever they were available I talked to them, that your daughter is not coming to the school, you should send her. In the PTA meetings we talk to the president about it. He [president] also talked to the parents.

As indicated in the above statement, Bhagchand, and in fact all teachers, appeared to be merely trying to fulfil the official targets imposed upon them. They seemed to be following the official instructions blindly without questioning the practical implications of this. This might be due to their relatively low status in the governmental and administrative hierarchy where their views are not heard and they themselves are expected just to follow instructions. Bhagchand's mention of involving the president of the PTA in the move to persuade parents sounded very encouraging initially. But a closer look revealed that even parents involved in the PTA in my sample, for example Bansu, whose older brother was a former president of the PTA, did not send their daughters to school. Though Bansu's brother was the president of the PTA, all three of Bansu's daughters were out of school at the time of interview. Being a part of the family of the former PTA president was not influential enough to enrol two of Bansu's daughters and prevent the other daughter from dropping out. This poses questions about the role of the PTA as a whole as well as the impact of the involvement of the president in this endeavour. When the president was not sensitive towards the un-enrolled and drop-out status of the daughters of his own younger brother, his ability to convince other villagers in this matter seemed limited, to say the least.

Ramesh pointed out some of the practical obstacles teachers faced while negotiating with parents of out-of-school girls. At the same time, he tried to position himself on the safe side by over-emphasising his own attempts to beat all odds. The following indicated this:

> Ramesh: I contact them, go to their houses. But whenever we go there they are not in the house, they go early in the morning for their work, … they go to very far-off places and they come home late in the evening. If you call them to the school they won't turn up. But even then we try to make them understand whenever we have a chance to meet them.
> Q: Uh huh, then it must be very hard for you to even meet them.
> Ramesh: Yes, it is. Should we teach in the school or should we run after the parents of the children? If we go to their houses daily, then who will take care of the school and teaching here? Already there is a lot of work pressure on us. But even then I personally do whatever I can to bring the children to the school.

The combination of Ramesh's outsider status (i.e. he was not from the same community that he served) and his living away from the village restricted him from meeting parents and this was very much noticeable. As he commuted from the block head quarter, he came and went according to the school hours and did not wish to stay beyond that. His

chances of meeting parents were therefore reduced dramatically as during his stay in the school the parents were away from their houses in search of their livelihood. In their struggle to meet the basic needs of the family, the parents obviously had no time to join the teacher at the school or be available to him when he came during the day. The teacher had no intention of making extra efforts to reach out to them. In either circumstance, it was the education of the girls which suffered. In response to my eagerness to know what he actually did, he said:

> Ramesh: This, contacting them and persuading them to send their girls to the school, I talk to them.
> Q: How do you do that? When do you find them?
> Ramesh: I try to contact them whenever and wherever I find them, on the way, in their field, in the market. I send the children of the neighbouring houses to talk to them too.

It was easy for him to say that he contacted parents on the way, in their field and even in the market places as presumably he was assured that it was difficult on my part to cross-check his assertions. I did not feel the need for cross-checking the statements of the teacher as his mere way of talking, for instance, 'This, contacting them …' indicated a lack of seriousness in his approach. Additionally, his selection of the market place to contact parents to discuss the issue of girls' education in passing, symbolised the trivial value he attached to the issue. He was also an example of negativity in his doubts about the relevance of a teacher contacting the parents when they already had a tremendous amount of work. Thus teachers in general appeared to adopt a non-sensitive attitude regarding community mobilisation to promote girls' education.

Further discussion with Ramesh threw more light on why parents of out-of-school girls turned a deaf ear to what the teacher said. This was apparent from his statement:

> We try to make them understand the importance of studying, that now-a-days children are getting everything, everything is free for them, they need not have to purchase books for their children, food is given, all facilities are provided in the school, they should send their children to the school. I try to make them understand the value of education. I tell them you have wasted your life, don't do the same with your children, send them to the school, if they study they can get a job, they do not have to suffer like you are suffering by doing daily labour.

As clearly observable from his account, this teacher carried the message of the availability of incentives in the school at least as much as education and its importance in

real life situations. At the same time as talking about education and its significance in the life of a girl he focussed on the supply of free textbooks and mid-day meals in school. Where he discussed the relevance of education he attached it strongly to obtaining a job and moving beyond subsistence living.

But when parents see a major incongruity in teachers' statement in relation to the realities of the job market which seems to be very gloomy, they lose faith in the teachers' words and consequently do not attach much value to what they say. Though Ramesh declared that he incorporated the 'value of education' in his discussion with the parents, there was no such visible mention in his statement other than 'getting a job' and 'moving beyond waged labour'. Thus as anticipated the parents were not much stimulated by this approach. Additionally, as indicated by most of the parents themselves in my research and Bhagchand, the parents were not very much interested in the incentives provided in the school.

Irrespective of the tall claims made by the teachers regarding their influencing parents, the fact remains that they have a long way to go on the path of winning over the parents' hearts. Along with considering the importance of establishing a dialogue with the parents which seemed to be lacking amongst the teachers, their sincerity in maintaining an accurate database of out-of-school children was also in question. Bhagchand indicated this when he said:

> Every year I maintain the register of out-of-school children, so that people from the higher office come and see the problems we are facing here. I show the figure very honestly. But there are teachers, if you go to the other villages you will find in the register of the school that all the children of the village are enrolled. But actually there are children who are out of school. They [teachers] only work on paper.

Bhagchand's revelation raises serious concerns which need to be addressed. His accusation that his fellow teachers were not maintaining accurate data about out-of-school children explains why I could not find the village education register in the first village. Probably either the register was not maintained or was not in existence or else was counterfeited by the teachers.

Changing the minds and hearts of people, bringing revolution to a community by challenging age-old practices does not sound an easy task for teachers. It needs continuous effort. But in a scenario as in this case, where the teacher himself is de-motivated, disgruntled, not committed, without professional ethos and already feels pressurised with the work burden imposed from the concerned department, one cannot expect much. The teachers I interviewed exhibited a sense of not owning the responsibility for community mobilisation as their duty, or they tended to avoid it as it seemed daunting. Instead they concentrated on the easier tasks such as the distribution of incentives, and the opening and closing of the school. As a consequence, in the absence of proper community mobilization, parents stuck to their own understanding of following conventional practice - sending their sons to school and keeping daughters at home after a certain age.

How do the teachers relate to the education department?

How teachers relate to the education department is crucial for sustaining the motivation and professional commitment of teachers and thereby improving school quality. My discussion with the teachers revealed the existence of a strained relation between the teachers and the department. None of the teachers felt enthusiastic while talking about their department. They displayed a sense of helplessness. For instance, Bhagchand said, 'We want to do a lot of things but are unable to do so, our hands are tied and we are helpless'. His account indicated the existence of a top-down power structure where Bhagchand in particular and teachers in general found themselves at the bottom. Ramesh's voice was rather radical. He said, '… they are making it harder for teachers. The more we are doing the more they expect us to do'. He included the government as a whole and the education department in particular when he said 'they':

> The government, the department, they want teachers to work like a slave but do not provide any facilities, they pay us meagre amounts and expect miracles from us.

Inadequate payment, miserable working conditions and over-work were the allegations made repeatedly by the teachers. Their views substantiated what was highlighted in the Madhya Pradesh Human Development Report:

> The rural primary school teacher occupies the most unenviable position in the highly hierarchical administrative structure, and is normally expected to bear the burden of the crucial task of 'nation building' in complete isolation, with

hardly any support. … In addition, teaching seems to be only one of the many jobs of the teacher - often the least important as far as the administration is concerned. From the census to elections, from family planning programmes to the photo identity card, the teacher seems to be the sole multipurpose village functionary, expected to perform whatever function the government finds necessary at any given time. (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1995: 40)

Ramesh even discarded the training programmes which were meant for teacher development by saying that they intervened in his holidays. He said rather disappointedly:

And for that [training programme] our summer vacation gets spoiled, we do not get any holidays, I mean, teachers are oppressed from every angle. We have to work during school days and attend training during our holidays. We have no time left for our families.

Unlike Ramesh, Bhagchand narrated his feelings of helplessness in a different manner. He recounted a practical problem he and other teachers faced due to, according to him, un-thoughtful impositions from the department. He said:

What can we do? I wish all the children of the village would come and study, but the government has fixed certain rules like there is a fixed timetable, within the stipulated time that portion has to be covered, whether the children are learning or not learning we have to move forward to the next chapter. Those who do not understand, they lag behind, we finish the book and they do not even know how to read the book.

Bhagchand thought that the pressure from the department to complete the lessons within a particular time period ignored the slow pace of learning of certain children. This contributed to the dropping-out of children from the school as they started lagging behind the rest of the class. Ironically, though Bhagchand felt that if there was no restriction from the department and teachers were free to handle the class based on its requirements they could deliver much more than they were doing now, he defended the act of the department by saying that some of the teachers might unjustifiably benefit from it. In his own words:

Yes, … but there are some people who take undue advantage of this, if they are free to do whatever they want then they will not do anything at all. They write the daily diary and keep the records updated but do not do the teaching, the main task.

He was hinting at a practice quite prevalent amongst teachers. The department presumably wants to make the system work by making it more watertight. To do so it imposes certain things on the teachers such as filling in forms and maintaining a daily

diary to make sure that teaching occurs in the schools. But in the absence of a viable working environment, support and motivation, the teachers tended to stick to the former two tasks, avoiding the latter one. Most probably because filling in forms and a diary was tangible and verifiable during supervision and inspection by the higher authorities, but teaching-learning was not necessarily recorded, making it more difficult to inspect. In relation to the issue of learning outcomes the teachers had several excuses such as, 'the children are not regular' (Ghanshyam), 'the children are from very disadvantaged families, their parents do not bother or cannot help them in learning' (Ramesh), and 'they do not do homework, the parents never encourage them to do homework' (Ghanshyam).

Bhagchand too tried to distance himself from the category of teachers who do not perform their duties well. While discussing the issue of community mobilisation, Ramesh once again highlighted the pathetic condition of teachers who have to bear the entire load of the department. He said:

> Everything they will put on the head of the teacher, the state office will send a letter to the district, district office will send it to the block, from block it will come to us through the cluster. Ultimately it is the teacher who has to do everything. What can the teacher, poor fellow do, single-handed?

Clearly, as reflected in the revelations of these teachers, there was a feeling of discontent amongst them. They expected more support, a more sympathetic attitude, and a reduction in the tasks that they considered unnecessary. The department and thereby the government, as indicated by the teachers, had lost faith in them. This was revealed when Ramesh said, 'they [government] have no faith in us so they engage somebody to watch and monitor us each and every day.' He was perhaps indicating the PTA being given the power to monitor the attendance of the teacher in school. There seemed to be a constant and ongoing struggle between the two, the creator and planner, the government and the implementer at the ultimate level, the teacher. The former trying to pull the string of control tight whilst the latter was trying to find a way out. Caught in this struggle, there seemed to be no room for thinking or acting towards bringing all children and in particular all girls into the fold of education. As a result, it is not surprising to see a number of girls of school-going age group in the village engaged in activities such as carrying water, collecting firewood, waged labour, minding their younger siblings, cooking, so on and so forth during school hours. They seemed to be engaged in any

activity other than studying in school, where they should be, thus being denied an education which is their right.

An unfinished agenda

The teacher, 'the protagonist' in the system, seemed to be, as revealed by my research participants, fed up with the 'dismal working condition, and lack of [motivation and] recognition of their efforts' (Rampal, 2000: 2528). As a result, in the long run they tended to give up. This was indicated in Bhagchand's statement:

> … the teachers also need to be more active. They do not have any relation with the villagers, they come late and go early, at their own wish. They do not teach. But you cannot blame them also, now-a-days to run a family at least Rs. 5000 is required but they are given only Rs. 2500, so the teacher wants to do some other business to run his family. So he comes late or goes early from the school or does not pay much attention to the school.

By referring to teachers as 'they', Bhagchand took care to distance himself from the category of teachers who were not loyal to their duties. Though he gave a valid reason for this situation, saving face was probably paramount here. Thus it is not surprising when a study carried out by the Bodh Shiksha Samiti pointed out that, 'These places are called schools, but are so in name alone. Real schooling is just not possible there' (MHRD, 1999 as cited in Rampal, 2000: 2529). My field observations corroborated what the above report indicated, though I would argue that converting the school into a real place for learning is in fact possible, provided the system is proactive towards it and teachers are not left alone in their struggle.

Classroom observation revealed what went on. In none of the schools that I visited were the teachers engaged in teaching in any meaningful sense. Rather, it was very common to find children who squatted in a class-like row on the floor, engaged in basic exercises, for example writing the alphabet and numbers. This exercise sounds fruitful for the students of class one but one wonders when the same is done by the students of class three and sometimes even four. I also observed children copying down the answers from the blackboard written by the teacher. The normal way of transaction of a lesson irrespective of its subject matter and content (this does not include lessons of mathematics) consisted of, 1) the teacher reading the lesson aloud to which in some cases, children repeated each sentence after the teacher which predictably took quite a long time, 2) at the end of the

lesson the teacher announced that they would be doing the answers now and wrote the answers of the given questions on the blackboard, 3) the children were asked to copy the answers into their notebook and learn them by heart. In the case of mathematics, the teacher solved the sums on the blackboard and asked students to copy them. Situations such as a discussion of the lesson, verifying whether pupils understood it, asking questions and allowing pupils to ask questions were either very limited or completely absent.

Predictably, the learning outcome for the children was abysmal. Ramachandran's study in three other states of India observed similar phenomena. She reported that:

> […] we observed that most children in classes III, IV and V were neither able to read fluently from their textbooks, nor could they solve simple addition or subtraction sums. Most children in class II were unable to recognise alphabets or numerals; children in class III were also unable to read, write or count, though they knew certain lessons by rote (2004a: 3).

Ramachandran's findings were similar to my experiences in the villages I visited. I found children of class four and five stutter while reading and most commonly reading words with much difficulty rather than reading sentences, without any comprehension of the text. In such a gloomy atmosphere I was thrilled to see the book (which was designed to serve the purpose of a workbook) of a girl of class three filled with accurate answers to the questions. My initial impression was that she had mastered the answers as a process of copying from the board into her notebook and thus was able to write herself. My excitement faded away as she could not read what I thought was written by her into her book. On my enquiry she revealed the fact, that 'teacher wrote it, not me'.

In a multi-grade situation where a teacher has to manage all five classes by himself,[60] most of his time is spent supervising and managing children rather than teaching. Managing five classes in one go and teaching is painstaking work and viewed as impossible by the teachers. At the same time they were concerned about the school inspection done by the higher authorities. Writing down the answers in the book of

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[60]As observed in the schools under study, where there were two teachers, taking turns in coming to school was a usual practice. Either one of them remained absent, or one came late in the morning and the other went early in the afternoon. Leaving or sending leave applications for absence in school on school days was never practiced amongst teachers. The usual answer I got regarding absence or late coming was, 'gone to the cluster centre for furnishing information', 'not well' or 'gone for an official meeting'. In any such circumstances all the five classes were left with only one teacher to manage.

students himself seemed an easy way to manage the situation and if it did not get appreciation from the higher ups, it at least helped avoid their criticisms.

Conclusions

The absence of female teachers in my sample in particular, and the presence of a limited number of female teachers in rural schools in general, constrains girls' participation in education. This scenario does not provide the role models for parents and girls that are required to influence their decision in favour of girls' schooling. The 'long-established quotas in the state for the recruitment of female teachers' seem to remain a policy on paper as the state has failed to put it into practice in its real sense. This state of affairs is a function to the wide-spread corruption in the area of teacher deployment, where a teacher with close contacts to a public representative or by paying a bribe can easily manage to get herself posted to a school of her choice. Additionally, in the absence of adequate incentives female teachers are not motivated enough to work in schools located in rural and remote areas.

Although considered as the '"*sutradhaar*" or protagonist of the entire educational Programme' (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1995), an important pillar of the system in maintaining and sustaining quality education, my fieldwork suggests that the teachers are a weak link with feeble voices. Teachers who are weakly positioned in the system lack motivation, commitment and enthusiasm which unfavourably affects the academic environment of the school. This in turn discourages parents from enrolling their children, more specifically their daughters, in school. The teachers I interviewed admitted that they were not able to deliver their duty, that is teaching pupils at their optimum level. To explain this, they pointed towards the community as well as their department. They revealed a sense of suffocation. As they had to teach three to five classes single-handedly which they felt was humanly impossible to manage, they tended to relinquish this in the long run. Instead, they found it easier to resort to tasks such as filling in data, maintaining a daily diary and up-dating other secondary information of the school which could be checked at the time of inspection from the higher authorities. The teachers felt that they were not supported enough by the department to carry out their day-to-day activities. For them, the training they received did not provide the teaching skills to cater for their

requirements. It neither offered any solution to the problems they faced in the classroom nor strengthened their skills in handling simultaneous multi-grade teaching situations.

The teachers believed that there was attrition of their status in the community in general and they blamed the department for that. They thought as they were paid meagrely and were oppressed by the department their value in society had gone down as no one had the same respect which a teacher in the past[61] attracted. Though all three teachers held the same view that in general, the teaching profession has little status in society, they all tried to emphasise that on a personal level they were able to hold the community they serve on their side. All of them gave a bright picture of their relation with the community by saying that the community members did respect them, although they were highly aware that the community turned a deaf ear to what they said. The teachers appeared to be content with this as they thought, though they were unable to influence the community, at least they were not openly disrespected by them. It appeared as though the teachers deliberately maintained a distance from the community but whenever required, pointed the finger at the community by saying that it was the community which was apathetic towards the school and did not want to be involved, however hard the teachers tried from their end.

The parent-teacher association which was supposed to strengthen the link between the community and the school was predominantly dysfunctional with the majority of parents, including all the mothers in my sample, remaining unaware of it. None of the parents who by default were the members of the PTA had any idea about its functioning or its rights and responsibilities. The PTA president of one school who was the joint signatory of the school account also had little knowledge about his role in operating the account. The teachers appeared to be efficient in managing to obtain the signature of the president without passing on much knowledge about the operation of the school funds. They tended to do so with the fear of loss of authority over the community if the latter were empowered to intervene in the management of the school.

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[61]Teachers, commonly called *Guru*, in ancient India held a high status in the community. They were considered as a friend, philosopher and guide, not only to their students but also to the entire community they served. They enjoyed greater influence over the community members who regarded the words of the *Guru* as unchallengeable.

As the teachers were inclined to keep aloof from the community, the already existing physical and social distance between them appeared to be overstretched. This in turn adversely affected the understanding and perception of the teachers regarding the traditional values and practices of the community. The teachers displayed a generic view of the reasons for the non-participation of girls in school education in the absence of any detailed understanding of what went on in their immediate environment. Two of the three teachers had no idea about the number of out-of-school girls in the village and predictably had no clue about their absence from the school. They displayed an indifferent attitude towards the non-participation of girls in school as sending children to school was seen by them as the responsibility of the parents.

Though the teachers were aware to certain extent of the general traditional social practices which hampered girls' education, they made no real effort to counteract this. They were not in a position to challenge the practices that militate against girls' education as they themselves, in a way, approved of the existing values or felt powerless to go against them. In the attempt to defend themselves, it was easy for the teachers to blame the villagers by branding them 'very traditional', 'do not want to change' or 'difficult to change their attitude'.

At the same time the teachers felt themselves alone in their struggle to fulfil the educational needs of marginalised, socially and physically remote communities. They found themselves at the bottom of the power pyramid with no voice, left amidst many problems and without any support from the department. They considered the department or administration as authoritative, imposing unnecessary tasks on them. All the teachers were strongly critical of their engagement in non-academic activities which they considered the main reason for their under-performance at school. Though there was an Act, enacted by the state back in 2002 preventing the deployment of teachers in non-academic tasks, the status of enforcement of the Act was in question, as the provisions of the Act were not followed by the administration itself.

Thus buried under a pile of unmanageable tasks and assignments, in an unconducive working environment and with no support from the department, the teachers seemed to

have developed an unconcerned attitude towards their profession and were on the verge of becoming completely lethargic. Teachers, the supposedly strongest link of the education department, appeared to be the weakest link. They preferred to follow the instructions of the higher authorities almost blindly concerning paperwork and fulfilling targets only on paper. As a result, teaching-learning in the school, establishing a meaningful dialogue with the parents, community participation and community mobilisation which are crucial to bringing change in the direction of girls' participation in school took a back seat. As evident from the discussion with the teachers the role of the administrators of their department surfaced as one of the decisive factors in their behaviour. Girls' participation in school, as it appeared from the arguments put forward by the teachers, was also dependent on the administrators' perception of their role in the entire process and their efficiency in the management of the teaching-learning process as a whole. And in the next chapter I shall analyse this in detail.

Chapter 7

The Administration's Role in the Management of Educational Programmes and its Impact on Girls' Education

It was more than evident from the discussion with the teachers that the role and commitment of higher-level education administrators in supporting the participation of girls in school education is a key factor. These administrators can either nurture and create an enabling environment to motivate teachers or can damage the system with their indifferent attitude. In this chapter I investigate the domain of the administrators of the education department to analyse their role in and contribution towards supporting girls' education. Here I discuss the role of the administrators as they understand it, their views of the education system, the teachers and the community for whom they are responsible, all in relation to their views of girls' education.

Before I discuss the administrators' perceptions of their role in supporting the education system, I shall provide an outline of the system in which they operate and their role within the organisation as envisaged in theory. For the purpose of planning and co-ordinating the implementation of the programmes for elementary education in a district, supportive institutions have been established at various levels such as the *Jan Shiksha Kendra*, the Cluster Resource Centre (CRC) at the cluster level; the *Janpad Shiksha Kendra*, the Block Resource Centre (BRC) at the block level; and the *Zila Shiksha Kendra*, the District Project Office (DPO) at the district level.

Figure 3. Management, implementation and support structure of elementary education from the school to the district level.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              School & PTA                     │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                      │
                      ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│           Jan Shiksha Kendra                  │
│       Cluster Resource Centre (CRC)           │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                      │
                      ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│          Janpad Shiksha Kendra                │
│        Block Resource Centre (BRC)            │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                      │
                      ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│            Zila Shiksha Kendra                │
│       District Project Office (DPO)           │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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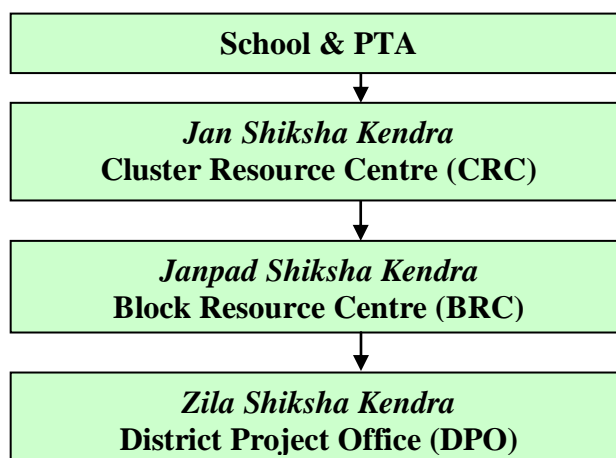
Source: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for all movement) – Madhya Pradesh: Annual Work Plan and Budget 2008-09 (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2008a).

These three institutions are all staffed with functionaries who are supposed to support the schools and teachers in fulfilling the goals of Education For All (EFA) in a district. The philosophy behind the establishment of these support institutions as envisioned in the Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam (JSA) 2002 was as follows: In a cluster of schools spread over the radius of eight kilometres, one of the middle schools is identified as the CRC and includes all the government primary and government middle schools coming under that particular cluster. The purpose of setting up the CRC was to 'work as a quality circle' for the primary and middle schools under it (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2003: 15). The key functions of this quality circle as enshrined in the Madhya Pradesh Jan Shiksha Niyam 2003 are to:

- establish a mutual academic support system amongst the teachers;

- make available opportunities for the exchange of qualitative methodology for teaching-learning;

- solve the problems faced in the academic process;

- support the school academically;

- organize teachers' training on the basis of identified training requirements of the teachers. (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2003: 15)

To fulfil the above mentioned agendas in the cluster a teacher is appointed as *Jan Shikshak*, the Cluster Academic Co-ordinator (CAC) from among the schools of the concerned cluster. The major responsibilities of the CAC are to:

- take up all endeavours in improving the quality of learning level [*sic*] of all the children enrolled in the schools coming under his jurisdiction that is the CRC;

- monitor to ensure improvement in the status of key educational indicators such as enrolment, regular attendance and level of achievement of children in schools;

- supervise the primary schools once in every month to provide academic guidance and support to the teachers;

- organise the monthly meetings of the teachers of primary sections to discuss and solve the problems focusing on especially academic and other school related issues encountered by the teachers;

- motivate the community for encouraging girls' education and the deprived section of the society. (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2003: 19-21)

Likewise, the role of the functionaries at the block and district level is to co-ordinate activities related to elementary education and to provide support, including academic and administrative, to the teachers. In theory, then, the sole purpose of these support institutions is to create a conducive atmosphere for the school in an effort to universalize elementary education.

Against this backdrop, I tried to explore how far the vision of universalizing elementary education was developed amongst the district and sub-district level administrators, that is, their understanding of the role they play and the efforts undertaken by them in fulfilling the goals of EFA, and specifically reducing the gender imbalance in school education. Similar to the sample of teachers in my research, the administrators were mostly male. Out of the five administrators I interviewed, only one was female, occupying the post of Gender Co-ordinator (GC) at the district level. Interestingly, none of the co-ordinators at

the cluster or block level were female. Normally the post of GC (the only post at the district level) is filled by a female employee. Though in previous years Ratlam district had had two female block resource centre co-ordinators (BRCC), at the time of interviewing in 2008 all the BRCCs in the district were male. At the cluster level too all the 16 CRCs in the Sailana block and all the 120 CACs of the district were male. The need for extensive travelling, at least theoretically, for the co-ordinator's post at the district, block and cluster levels, was perhaps the reason behind the absence of female employees in these positions. The impact of creating one post of gender co-ordinator, and appointing a female to this post, on the enrolment and retention of girls in school is still unclear and I discuss this aspect below.

How the administrators perceived their role

My discussions with the teachers showed, as indicated in chapter 6, that they did not feel they received any support from the administrators in sorting out their problems. In order to explore whether the administrators understood their role I asked them about the major responsibilities of their post. Nitin, the cluster level functionary, that is the CAC, said:

> My main work is to help the teachers in the teaching process. I help them in how to teach the lessons and give them academic support. Conduct monthly meeting of teachers to provide academic assistance. There is the coordination work too with the block resource centre and the cluster resource centre. But the main responsibility is to provide academic support to teachers.

Dhanraj, the other CAC in my sample, pointed out that:

> Umm … number one is to try to bring and enrol all the children in the school whether boys or girls, nobody should be out of school, nobody should drop out of school. Then, ... to assist the teachers to solve the problems that they face in teaching by organising training. And to carry feedback from the bottom level to the top level such as what is the problem and where is the problem so that the problems can be rectified. These are the main responsibilities of the *Janshikshak*.

While Nitin saw his role as providing academic support and co-ordination with the block, Dhanraj had a clearer view of his role as a CAC. It is possible that his mention of the enrolment of children in school as his foremost duty was due to his awareness of the topic of my research. As I gave a brief outline of my research at the beginning of our talk, Dhanraj was conscious enough to talk in line with my research topic, that is enrolment and the retention of girls in school.

Both the CACs I interviewed had had their posts since the inception of the DPEP,[62] had thus been in their post for a long time and were fully aware of their role in the school education system.

Rajesh, the co-ordinator at the block level took the same line as Dhanraj when talking about the role of the BRCC:

> The first thing is to enrol the out-of-school children in the school, bring back the children, those who have dropped out from the school. Improve girls' enrolment, motivate parents to send their children to school. We do this through PTAs and by using the media for campaigning. Then the next is collecting data that is required to assess what was to be done and how much we have done. Other than this all the matters related to education is done from here [BRC].

Rajesh too tried to impress me by listing issues such as the enrolment of out-of-school children and girls as the first and foremost responsibility of his post. In so doing, he forgot to consider that he as a co-ordinator at the block level had a lot of managerial functions to perform. When I reminded him of the managerial nature of his post, he added:

> Yes, management also, we manage the government schools through the BEO[63] but the academic aspect of the school we manage by ourselves. After the child is in school, what happens to his academic growth is managed by us through our *Janshikshaks* and block academic co-ordinators[64]. But other than this we try to sort out the problem of drop-outs.

Though the BRC has a lot of managerial and administrative duties such as the distribution of incentives, the supervision of schools and the organisation of training, to list a few, Rajesh had the impression that all the managerial responsibilities were with the BEO and not him. Although at first he put the 'enrolment of out-of-school children' as the prime concern of his office, his later statement focused on 'children in school' generally and thereby contradicted his initial concern.

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[62]The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was launched in 1994 in this state as well as in other parts of India with the aim of universalising primary education. The concept of the cluster academic coordinator (CAC) was introduced under this scheme to provide *in situ* academic support to teachers.

[63]The block education officer (BEO) is the administrative head of the school education department at the block level who has control of all government schools from the point of view of administration regarding the posting and transfer of teachers, payment of teachers' salary, taking disciplinary actions against teachers if required, etc.

[64]Three academic co-ordinators are appointed at BRC, the block level, to provide subject specific academic support to the teachers teaching classes six to eight that is the middle level.

Arvind, the DPC who was the first in line amongst the co-ordinators in the district, was rather eager to detail the outcome of the efforts undertaken by his office while talking about his responsibilities. He took care to highlight that the interventions implemented by his office were in every way leading to the expected results:

> Well, as the DPC we are responsible for fulfilling all the objectives of the SSA and also work for the enrolment, retention and equity of gender, that is, promoting the education of girls and the enrolment in the schools. This is going on very well now, as more and more girls are being enrolled in school and their participation is improving but still some of the social barriers are showing their effect so we are also trying to improve some of the processes.

As his statement here showed, Arvind separated the issue of enrolment, retention and equity of gender from the objectives of the SSA ('and *also* work …'), although all these attributes are interwoven in the objectives of the SSA (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2008a: 11). This was possibly to stress his sensitiveness towards the issue of girls' enrolment and retention in school and to sketch an impressive picture of his district in this regard. I found that all the male administrators were self-aware enough to speak to my research enquiries and attempted to say what they thought I wanted to hear.

The gender co-ordinator, Meera, the only female amongst the administrators, whose prime responsibility was to strive for gender equity in education, displayed a rather blurred vision of her duties:

> Meera: My main work is to monitor the girls' hostels so that they are in systematic order and to take care of the girls residing in them.
> Q: Do you only take care of the girls' hostels?
> Meera: Not only the hostels but to know the level of their [girls'] studies, to know the level of their interest in study and helping them to create an interest in education. This is important because they come from a background, where they don't get the environment for studies.
> Q: Do you only work with the girls who are enrolled in the hostel or also with girls outside the hostels, I mean, who are not enrolled in girls' hostels?
> Meera: We work with all girls in general. It is an overall responsibility. Mostly I work with the girls in the bridge courses.
> Q: So, your main responsibility is to bring the children in, who are not in the education system. Am I right?
> Meera: Yeah, exactly, to mainstream them.

Meera concentrated on a few responsibilities she had without any holistic vision of the efforts she had to undertake as the gender coordinator of the district. Her account gave the impression that perhaps she was working in isolation, not aware of the objectives of

the SSA and focussed on the delivery of only the tasks entrusted to her by the DPC. She displayed no indication that she was a manager or co-ordinator at the district level and had the responsibility of making all efforts in narrowing the gender gap in education. In the absence of a clear view of her responsibilities, she counted upon interventions such as girls' hostels and bridge courses (which are temporary measures) to bring the out-of-school girls into the school system.

The administrators in my sample displayed a mixed picture of their understanding of their role and positioning in the system. Three of them tried to please me by talking about the enrolment of girls as their prime responsibility whereas the gender co-ordinator appeared to be confused and attached much value to a few interventions and not the overall vision and implementation of the programme.

The administrators' perception of the education department's role in promoting girls' education

The support institution at each level such as the CRC, BRC and DPO has its own specific roles and responsibilities towards achieving the goals of education for all. Understanding the key role of the institution and their responsibilities within the institution is significant in enabling administrators to achieve the successful implementation of the interventions and achievement of the goals. When asked about the role of the CRC in promoting girls' education Nitin said:

> We [CRC] can motivate girls to go to school. We can contact their parents, tell them about the facilities available for them, make them understand and motivate them to send their children to the school.

Regarding his own responsibilities in promoting girls' education he had nothing to add other than talking to parents regarding the importance of education for girls:

> For enrolling girls we contact their parents, discuss with them the importance of educating girls, try to make them understand that for girls also it is necessary to study.

Dhanraj, the other CAC in my sample, professed the same though he added the identification of out-of-school girls into his list:

> For this, under the scheme of S*arva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) we do the survey of each village to find the number of out-of-school girls in the village, we talk

to the parents of the out-of-school girls, tell them about the facilities provided to girls if they come to the school and try to bring all of them to the school.

Regarding his own efforts to increase the participation of girls in school he responded in a more generic way.

> Dhanraj: The effort of bringing girls to the school is not done only at some point of time, it goes on throughout the year. Whenever we see somebody not going to school, we talk to them to make them understand, we do not do it only for one month but the efforts are on always.
> Q: What are those efforts? What exactly do you do?
> Dhanraj: For example when I go to a particular village and come to know that some children are not in school, I ask the school children, they say who is not in the school from their village, at that moment I go to that particular family and try to bring them to the school. I do it on a routine basis, I go to the schools regularly and ask about the children who are out of school and try my best so that they are in school. Not only me, all the *Janshikshaks* do this every day, continuously.

His account suggested that CACs contact the parents of the out-of-school girls and try to motivate them to send their daughters to school. However, as indicated, motivating parents seems mainly to involve imparting information of the facilities available for girls in school. The claim made by Dhanraj did not match the field reality. For example, out of 28 girls (of school-going age) in my sample, 24 were out of school at the time of the interview (in 2008). It can be argued that if the cause of enrolling all children including all girls was taken up so seriously by him, who had been working on this for nearly a decade, there should not still be so many girls not attending. Furthermore, neither Nitin nor Dhanraj said anything pertaining to ensuring the regular and timely opening of schools, ensuring the presence of the teachers in school during school time, meaningful teaching by teachers, enhancing the quality of teaching in schools and thereby producing a school that attracts girls and their parents. In contrast to these administrators' vision, the parents and the girls aspired to a school where the teacher was present and was teaching and the girls were learning.

The BRC which has a broader jurisdiction from the point of view of geographical area, has many managerial responsibilities. Rajesh pointed out:

> For girls' education we ensure the implementation of all the programmes of the government meant for girls' education. For example, uniforms, the result of distributing uniforms is tremendous, the enrolment, specially of girls, has increased in the last few years due to this. In this area there is a lot of change you can see these days. For girls the hostel facility that we have is working

very well, it has got positive impact. Girls are coming and staying in the hostel and studying.

Rajesh focussed only on the uniform and hostel facility for girls as measures for promoting girls' education and once again went on to give a bright picture of his efforts. Regarding his personal efforts Rajesh again mentioned the girls' hostel and added the residential bridge course (RBC):

> The girls' hostels that we are running and the RBC that we run are very successful to bring girls into the fold of education. Through the RBC a lot of girls came and we helped them to get into mainstream education. And the girls' hostel is like a blessing for girls.

Meera had the same story. She even went to the extent of explaining the details of the difference between a girls' hostel and a bridge course, a matter of specificity inappropriate for the level at which she was working.

> Meera: There are many different types of plans which have been implemented such as opening hostels for girls and running bridge courses. The difference between the hostel and the bridge course is that the hostel is attached to a school so the girls residing in that hostel go to school, study there and have their exams there. But on the bridge course unless it is a residential one, they live with their family and study in the centre.
> Q: What else is done by your department to promote girls' education?
> Meera: Many other things such as providing a mid-day meal, free textbooks, free uniforms, providing cycles to girls who live far away from the school.

The accounts of these administrators displayed their narrow understanding of girls' education and the naive approach they adopt to this cause. For them, providing a few incentives and opening residential facilities for girls would resolve the problem. In contrast, my discussion with the parents (see in chapter 4, page: 129 and 130) indicated that these incentives were not incredibly effective in drawing their attention. The girls and their parents revealed that it was not the incentives but the quality of the education available in the school that mattered (see chapter 4, page: 138). This indicated that the administrators failed to get to the bottom of certain problems and were content with playing around the surface of the issue.

Arvind, the DPC, initially emphasised only certain provisions, but eventually indicated a somewhat broader understanding of the role of his office when he said:

> We have introduced many suitable schemes for this purpose, such as free uniforms, which has built lot of confidence in recent times. This has

improved enrolment. Now we are providing every girl enrolled in class six with a free cycle which was limited to only a particular category of girls till last year. So this has also had a very positive effect because earlier girls used to drop out from school after class five. Now that percent has decreased and girls are going to schools in other villages too for class six.

He went on to add some of the issues vital for bridging the existing gap between the genders in education:

> A lot of things have been done. The first thing we tried was to provide separate toilets for girls in every school, provide at least one lady teacher in every school, and all the incentives provided to children by the government such as uniforms, bicycle, scholarships should be available to them on time, orienting PTA and the local community towards the rights of girls as children and for equal treatment of girls in all activities. Bringing back the dropout girls who left school in class four or five through girls' hostels, bridge courses or open school and mainstreaming them to give an equal opportunity for their development and progress. These are the priorities that we have.

The administrators at the cluster level saw themselves and not teachers as the main person to contact the parents of out-of-school children and persuade them to send their children including their daughters to school. Beyond this they had very little sense of their responsibility to promote girls' education. For example, along with helping the teachers to contact parents they could motivate and inspire the teachers to build their capacity to deliver more academically, help them to establish a close bond with the community and credibility for the school. The BRC and the GC went just a step further and highlighted various interventions such as free uniforms, mid-day meals, hostels for girls and the bridge courses. They all failed to consider vital aspects such as ensuring the opening of the schools and teaching in it, ensuring that the incentives reach the beneficiaries and on time, community mobilisation and providing equal opportunities in promoting girls' education. It can be argued that though there was a certain understanding of what was required at district level, this seemed to be confined to the DPC, possibly due to his interaction with higher-level authorities. It appeared that the vision did not percolate to even the next level and the understanding of the officials got more blurred down the line.

The administrators' understanding of the barriers affecting girls' education

The administrators pointed out various socio-cultural barriers such as traditional gender role expectations and economic barriers that prevent girls from entering and staying in school. Nitin for example said:

> I think the social thought or mentality which is being carried over from the past is the main reason. The mentality, I mean, ... people think what is the use of educating girls, because they are not going to work. They are going to get married and their main work is to manage their house, prepare food and taking care of children. This has been there in our society from our ancestors' time, they have set all this. The mentality and situation in the urban areas has totally changed and girls are considered equal to boys but in the rural areas the mentality is still the same. The work division between men and women, that is, men means they have to do this and women will do this, this work division which has been set earlier is responsible for their mentality. If this mentality changes then there will be a great improvement. If they start thinking that education is also important for house-wives, for cultivators, then they will send their girls.

As suggested by Nitin, the traditional notion of gender stereotypes prevalent in rural society does not support girls' education. Nitin confirmed what the parents and the teachers had said. The parents and the teachers also pointed to the role of norms 'set by their ancestors' in deciding to keep girls at home instead of sending them to school. Although he did not mention very clearly the role of social pressure on villagers to conform to these norms, in a way his statement indicated the same.

His counterpart, Dhanraj, had an altogether different view:

> What I have observed is, it is the male, who does not want girls to study. This I have studied very well. Males do not want women to come to the forefront. They think that their supremacy will be affected. If girls study and come up then the value of male folk will get less. Women are aware and they understand. They are more enthusiastic to send their daughters to school but the male members of the family, they try to put them back in the house and do not allow it.

He indicated the predominance of patriarchy in rural society where girls and women are held back by male family members to preserve the latter's supremacy as the reason for girls' exclusion from education. According to Dhanraj men fear that their position will be affected if women are allowed to be empowered through education.

Along with traditional gender role thinking, the gendered distribution of labour and patriarchy, the usefulness of girls at home and their contribution towards family earnings was highlighted by the administrators. For example Rajesh said:

> Parents use the help of girls in the house and in their work areas. If they are going for labour or working in a shop, they use their daughter for finishing the housework, taking care of the younger children or the business. When the girl becomes big they make her prepare food and do other work at home, so slowly the girl's attention gets diverted from education and slowly she drops out of school. People are not very serious about education for their girls, they put them to housework, then girls become irregular and then they drop out.

Meera too had the opinion that girls were made to do household chores rather than attend school:

> Most of the girls are stopped by their parents from going to school because they want girls to do household work such as cooking food, taking care of a younger brother or sister. I think as girls remain in the house doing household work, they then are totally distracted from studies and then don't want to go to school. They find their household work more interesting than school. Even now some parents think that education is only for boys. They always keep the girls for work but not boys. I think even now the same mentality which was there earlier is partially there.

Later she made comments implying that the parents' preferential view of sons kept girls away from school. In a way, she also blamed the girls' parents for not allowing them to make use of the opportunity for education. The reason behind the notion of such son preference amongst the villagers was made clear by Rajesh:

> They are not serious about girls' education because the notion is that the girl has to go to another house, she has to marry and go to her own house. Parents think she is not going to do anything for us, she is not going to support us, so we should do things for the one who will support us. Not that they do not do anything for her but in comparison they do more for boys than girls. Of course there is a decline in this type of thinking but it has not gone completely.

The patri-local marriage system which supports a son preference attitude amongst parents lowers the status of girls and they are denied their rights including the right to education. Rajesh seemed to suggest that this was gradually changing. Arvind shared these views:

> Parents want to send girls now, the daughter will get married and go to the in-laws, she is the property of others and sending her to school is not that useful. This kind of mentality is changing now-a-days. The illiterate person in the village and the daily labourer also thinks these days that his children, irrespective whether they are a boy or girl, should go to school and study so that he/she will have a secure future. But when we talk about the role girls and women have in the family, there is no change in that. This will still

remain, they do the household work and take care of the members of the family. We cannot expect that girls will go to school and if they have a boy he will prepare food for the family, that much change cannot come at present, it will take some time for that. But among siblings, I have seen they support each other, brothers think their sisters should study like them but they feel helpless before the elders of the family to support her. Again I should emphasize here that there is a change, it will take another generation to bring full change but it will be achieved, that is for sure.

Though Arvind agreed with Rajesh that they could see change he had a completely different opinion regarding the value attached to girls' education by parents. In contradiction to Rajesh, his statement implied that at present (2008) parents valued the education of their daughters equally to that of their sons. He thought that though the parents had started to think that education is required for girls too, they were not ready to relinquish the notion of gender stereotyping. And indeed, the majority of parents I interviewed had a strong conception of gender stereotyping, thought girls were meant to be at home, and tended to send their sons to school in the hope of a secure future (see chapter 5, page: 152-153). Arvind thought it too early to anticipate any positive change in these gender stereotypes. This was evident from his saying 'that much change cannot come at present.' At the same time, he also sounded positive in his perception of change in the future, at least maybe for the next generation. His views were in line with those of one of the teachers in my sample as discussed in chapter 6 (page: 212).

The parents' poor economic condition was also identified as a reason why girls were not allowed to attend school. Nitin, for example, believed that as the parents were financially resource poor, they used their daughters to earn their daily necessities.

> I think the financial condition of the parents plays an important role in affecting the education of girls. Due to lack of resources parents send girls to work in the field or as labourer. For them money is more important than the education of girls. ... There is a saying which goes like this – '*Bhukhe pet bhajan na hoi*' [if the stomach is empty, then nothing can be done during that, not even worship], which is quite true. If the financial condition of parents is good then they think that there is something beyond housework, but if the financial situation is very tight then they cannot think of anything else.

It can be argued that more than the financial conditions of the family, gender stereotypes adversely affect girls' education, given the fact that boys of the same family in my sample were continuing in school whereas girls were either withdrawn or held back to work and earn for the family. An understanding of this gender stereotyping, which

seemed to be missing amongst the administrators at the cluster level, was demonstrated by the DPC who indicated clearly that it was the gender stereotypes that kept girls from school and not adverse economic circumstances *per se*.

The safety of the girls which emerged as an important issue from the parents' point of view was also raised by the administrators. For instance, Dhanraj said:

> Till the girls are becoming grown up, parents send them to school. After that they stop them. They think if their girl is going, then the boys will tease. Where you find the school in the village itself, parents will send their girls. After that if girls have to go to another village for class six, then there will be problems. Parents think, enough now, no need to go there, on the way boys will tease and there will be several problems. For girls, walking two to two and a half kilometres and going to another village becomes a problem, parents feel insecure about their girls. There are several elements in society, when the girls and boys are big, they attract each other, they [parents] are afraid that something may happen. And just after that they want to marry her off, if there is some controversy before the marriage then the poor girl and her family will be affected, this is the real problem.

Nitin had similar views:

> Parents don't feel comfortable if the school is a little bit far from the village and think it is not advisable to send their daughter to the school. I have seen parents who want their daughters to be educated but due to the distance they do not send their daughters to the school. It is a male-dominated society, for boys there is no control and they are free, parents know if the boy goes out he will come back by himself, but with girls there is always a problem, somebody has to accompany her wherever she goes, who will go with her? So they do not feel it is safe to send girls to school. We are living in a patriarchal society where parents feel girls are not secure, they are afraid of sending girls to a school which is a little bit far away. For example, in a village of my area there was a school with classes up to five so very few girls were going to middle school but now the government has opened a middle school in the village. After that a large number of girls were attending class six too.

Nitin's assertion that parents fear to send their daughter to attend school in a different village was in total contradiction to Arvind's view. He said that more recently girls had been attending class six by travelling by their bicycle provided by the education department to promote girls' education. Both Nitin and Dhanraj held the same views as the teachers when they spoke about parental fear regarding the safety of their daughters. Like the teachers they also mentioned girls encountering sexual harassment on their way to school and not in school.

As the CACs themselves were also basically teachers, their opinion had a clear match with that of the teachers in my sample. But the GC, Meera, had a completely different view and advocated the appointment of a woman teacher in each and every school:

> Meera: Parents are afraid of sending their grown-up girls to far-off schools. The rule of three km of distance for a middle school does not work in the rural areas. For grown-up girls, travelling three km and again travelling back three km is not a simple thing. Then there should be a woman teacher in every school. I would again stress that a woman teacher must be appointed in each and every school. Yes, that is very much needed, we are seeing the problems now-a-day that the male teachers create. The situation is not very good.
> Q: Could you explain it a bit more?
> Meera: ... I mean, the male teachers are not able to counsel girls properly. ... They also sometimes, umm, ... I would not say misbehave but they behave in an objectionable way with girls. Yes, sometimes they do this. That is why parents are afraid of sending girls to school.

Though a little hesitant initially, she came out very openly with the information that girls experience sexual harassment in school by teachers due to which parents prefer to keep them at home after they have reached puberty. It may have been easier for her to state this as she felt comfortable with me. But for the other administrators, our different gender was a barrier to talking about these matters openly.

Arvind too mentioned the importance of appointing women teachers in schools to encourage the greater participation of girls. He indicated an associated issue:

> In the urban area of course, it is not a problem but as soon as you go to the rural areas there is a shortage of women teachers in schools. There are no women teachers in schools, so along with teaching, the counselling of girls in their personal things, for example regarding their personal hygiene, gets affected; there is no one to assist them.

His assertion regarding the absence of women teachers in rural schools was corroborated by my findings. Other than the shortage of women teachers in rural areas, Arvind also thought the quality of teaching in schools was a major deciding factor in retaining not only girls but children as a whole:

> This of course is a very important issue, for both girls and for boys, and especially for girls. If a guardian sees there is no teaching in the school, teachers do not teach, girls are not treated properly, teachers and others students do not behave properly with them [girls], then they think there is no point in sending the girls to the school, they better do the job at home, they lose their faith in school. So, this is very important that schools open

regularly, there is regular teaching, children learn in school, if this condition is there, then girls come and parents send them happily.

Arvind thought that the perceived quality of the education was crucial in keeping children, especially girls in school. He also indicated that girls might not get proper treatment in school. Whether he pointed towards the sexual harassment of girls by teachers and fellow male students or towards teachers' underestimation of the girls' capability to study remained unclear. Nitin too agreed that if schools are not delivering much, this can affect the enrolment and retention of children:

Yeah, of course, the quality of teaching is a deciding factor. When children go back to their house they talk to their parents about the school, what they learnt today or did not learn, whether the teacher is teaching or not teaching, so this also affects the mind of the parents and ultimately the education of the children. Children also understand what's going on in the school. Children say everything rightly and truly. So when parents listen to all this, then they don't send them to school.

Rajesh kept the quality of teaching in school central:

Yes, the quality of teaching is the main factor, it influences everything. If the teaching is good then the retention will be there, other things are secondary, like books, uniforms and mid-day meal. If in a school, I am not saying that in our schools no teaching is going on, but if the teacher is teaching properly then the children will not care about the distance even, they will attend the school. But here there is no problem like this.

He acknowledged that teaching was the key factor in retaining children. Regular teaching in school motivated parents to enrol their children. He discarded the role of incentives in this regard by saying that they were 'secondary'. At the same time, Rajesh sounded very defensive about the schools in his block by adding immediately that in his schools no such problems existed. This he did in an attempt to provide a favourable picture of his and his team's efforts.

Dhanraj's statement was quite different from that of the other administrators. He said, 'A child does not know what quality is, for him whatever the teacher is teaching that is good.' Here he failed to envision the positive correlation between good teaching-learning atmospheres in school with that of increased retention of children including girls. Contrary to his remark, the girls in my sample expressed a strong view regarding the paucity of the teaching in schools. For instance, Rekha who had stopped going to school at class three mentioned, '… the teacher was not teaching much, some teaching also

should be there'. Similarly the parents had their reservations about the quality of the teaching in their village school as discussed at length in chapters 4 and 5. The PROBE (1999) team reported similar findings when they discussed low levels of teaching in schools. They found the teachers inactive, not engaged in any teaching activities during their visit in half of their sample schools. The PROBE team expressed its concern by saying, 'And this pattern is not confined to a minority of irresponsible teachers – it has become a way of life in the profession' (1999: 63). Adiga refers, rather sarcastically, to this trend amongst teachers by saying, '[t]he teacher was snoring at his desk behind me' (2008: 29).

The administrators' views were at odds with the field realities and the findings of external surveys. When I shared with Dhanraj the opinion of some of the parents regarding the poor quality of the teaching in school he said:

> The women teachers, don't take it otherwise, I am not saying anything against anybody, I am just saying what the fact is. The fact is, in women the sense of delivering duty, remaining in the class is less, they are more interested to talk to each other and do their own work, they are more worried about their own liabilities at home, their children and all, so they have less attention in the school. Due to this, the quality of teaching gets affected.

He blamed women teachers rather directly and kept male teachers completely out of this picture. Dhanraj who on one level was antagonistic to patriarchy saying - 'women are very smart and more knowledgeable, girls are not pushed by women, it is the male, who does not want girls to study', gave a totally contradictory statement here. He made comments implying that women teachers are not focussed on their work. This is rather ironic, given the fact that the teachers' workforce in rural Ratlam was skewed in favour of males (770 female teachers against 2268 males according to the 7th All India Educational Survey of 2002) and I encountered *no* female teachers in my sample (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2002). While he displayed some understanding that women teachers were caught between their responsibilities at home and in school, he offered an idiosyncratic and unconvincing explanation in this regard. Besides, he was more concerned to establish lack of interest amongst women teachers to teach than recognising the fact that the absence of any teaching was actually more discouraging to parents to send their daughters.

Meera had the same view of teachers not being conscientious regarding their duties but for her it was irrespective of their gender:

> Frankly speaking, the teachers don't take much interest in teaching. Sometimes they don't even come to school. We send our officials to schools for monitoring. During the visit of the monitor, teachers start teaching but as soon as the monitor is gone they again become slack. The quality of education delivered in schools is not up to the mark. In my view only 20 percent of teachers are doing their job with full responsibility. And in the villages the condition is even worse.

Meera observed that lack of interest amongst teachers towards delivering their responsibilities was more common in rural areas and at the same time the monitoring system was not impressive, 'I find that there is no impact of monitoring on schools', which made the situation more alarming.

The need for a lively academic atmosphere in a school to attract children was accentuated by Arvind:

> The academic atmosphere of schools is not very conducive, … this works as a push factor. A lot of work is still to be done in this regard, we are still trying our best to improve this situation. We have conducted training on 'joyful teaching-learning' and 'development of teaching-learning materials', we have provided funds to the teachers to develop teaching-learning material, but the actual condition in the schools are still the same. Students are afraid of coming to school, punishment in the school, fear of the teacher is still there in their mind, they do not feel happy to come to school. *Gijubhai*[65] said school should be such that children feel happy to hear the morning bell ringing in the school, they should run to reach the school, listening out for the bell and when the school bell rings at the end of the day they should feel sad to go home. But the actual situation in schools is just the opposite: children who come to school, come with a heavy heart and are not happy to be there. So the atmosphere of the school needs to be changed and improved. Till then, though we can achieve the target of enrolment, we will not be able to retain children there or the academic achievement level of children will not be improved. We have to do a lot of work in this regard.

Arvind's statement indicated a couple of issues: there was an absence of a good ambience in school which he admitted quite openly. Second, the efforts made by the district in training teachers to improve the situation had not yielded the desirable result. Third, though according to the Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam 2002, a teacher should 'teach in a child

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[65] *Gijubhai* was an inspiring teacher who rejected the orthodox system of school teaching and a famous writer who has produced a number of story books for children.

friendly manner' and 'abstain totally from physical punishment' (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2002b: 804(12)), the fear of school and the teacher was thought prevalent among the children. Last but not least, though the district was able to achieve the enrolment target by entering the names of children of school-going age into the school register, in actual practice children, especially girls, remained out of school.

This was also pointed out by the parents in my sample. They displayed displeasure regarding the unattractive atmosphere of the school and branded it a place where 'nothing happens', indicating 'no teaching'. As a result, they showed no interest in sending their daughters to school as sending girls to work, they thought, was more advisable since they could earn some additional money for their family. The school had nothing to offer, had a dull atmosphere and appeared to be a place where their daughters' time would be wasted although parents did not think in the same way in relation to their sons.

Whilst the administrators at the district level displayed some awareness of the existing loop holes in the schooling system, the block and cluster level officials showed no such understanding or they intentionally tried to cover up the situation. For instance, Dhanraj said, 'Very good, everything is very nice' when he commented on teaching-learning in the schools of his cluster and added, 'all the schools are running very well, no problem with that'. Rajesh claimed:

> All the schools are doing their duties perfectly, they are very prompt in providing facilities, there is no problem with that. We do a lot of monitoring and try to do things properly. In some of the schools the quality of the uniforms distributed last year was bad. We are trying to sort it out this year and we will do it better this year. But this type of case is very rare, if you think all the schools will be hundred percent perfect, then there will be *Ram rajya*[66] which I think is not possible.

As the above account makes clear, Rajesh thought all the schools in his block were doing their very best and delivering to their maximum capacity. He could identify only one issue that needed attention in the entire block. His belief that some problem always

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[66]*Ram rajya* refers to the rule of *Ram*, the Hindu God. According to mythology, Ram descended to earth and was born into the family of a king. He ruled as a king and in his dynasty during his tenure there was peace, prosperity, honesty and perfect order in society. *Ram rajya* is commonly used to refer to a situation or society where everything is perfect and where nothing goes wrong.

remains and the sense that one cannot have a perfect school system made him satisfied with the situation as it was as well as to overlook any notion of improvement. Regarding the available infrastructure facilities in the school the parents, the teachers and the administrators had different views. Some of the parents mentioned inadequate class rooms and lack of drinking water facilities in school (see chapter 4, page: 107 and 134). The teachers joined the parents in pointing out the insufficient number of classrooms in the schools which affects the teaching-learning process adversely (see chapter 6, page: 187 and 189). Interestingly enough none of the administrators talked about classrooms whilst discussing infrastructure facilities in the school. For the parents and the teachers this was a real difficulty but the administrators did not view it that way as for them, having two classrooms confirmed the appropriate provision by the state. This was evident from their statements. For instance, Dhanraj said, 'There is no problem with that, all the schools have all the facilities as per the norms of the government and where there are problems we are trying to deal with them immediately'. Thus for parents and teachers the number of classrooms was an issue as this posed practical difficulties but for the administrators it was a trivial issue.

There was yet another contradiction in the perception of the parents and the administrators regarding infrastructure facilities in school. A lack of toilet facilities and more specifically separate toilets for girls was highlighted by all the administrators. Nitin said:

> All the schools have their own buildings, there is no problem with that, but a few of the schools have no toilet, we are trying to provide toilets through the Total Sanitation Programme but still there are schools where there is no toilet, let alone a separate toilet for girls.

He emphasised the importance of having a separate toilet for girls in school. He also indicated that despite all efforts there were still schools without even a common toilet to meet the needs of both boys and girls. Rajesh who represented the entire block had a similar opinion as Nitin:

> There is no problem of infrastructure facilities here. Only in some schools are there no toilets, where toilets are there they remain very dirty due to lack of water facility. But we are working on this.

Rajesh pointed out the need for water to use the toilet and that schools were in need of this. His account confirmed what the parents had said earlier, that there was a lack of

water facilities in schools. The difference was that for parents it was drinking water that needed to be made available first which was not the case for Rajesh or the other administrators.

Arvind very strongly associated toilet facilities in school with the retention of girls:

> Arvind: A lot of initiatives have been taken in this regard but still there are a lot of gaps. When I go and see, I find only in ten percent of the schools they have constructed separate toilets for girls. They are in proper condition and girls are using them. It may appear to be a very small matter but it has got far-reaching implications for the retention of girls. There are toilets but they remain locked.
> Q: Why do you think it happens that way?
> Arvind: It happens out of neglect. For the teacher, the PTA or the community it is not a big problem, because the house is close by, girls can go and come back, so they do not take this seriously. But this actually is a very important factor, there should be a toilet in every school for girls, whether it is primary or middle school, a toilet should be there and it should be used.

Arvind's claim that for parents or the community, a toilet facility in the school was insignificant was actually substantiated by the views of the parents in my sample. Not a single parent pointed to the absence of a toilet as the reason for not sending their daughters to school. Correspondingly, none of the girls thought they had problems going to school in the absence of a toilet. For the parents and the girls teaching in school was more important than having a toilet.

Meera too mentioned the importance of a toilet in school for girls. At the same time and unlike her male counterparts she reflected on the problems within the system:

> Meera: I think, if we take facilities, then 50 percent of the schools still lag behind. For example, the toilets, especially for girls, are not there. Where it is there, it is locked up. The toilets are not in working order.
> Q: Why are they locked?
> Meera: The thing is that they [the department] have constructed the toilets but they are of so bad quality that girls can't use them. The structure itself is so weak, there is no proper planning. The sewage system is also bad that it smells if used a couple of times, so the villagers just lock those toilets because no one can use them. What is the use of making such kind of things when no one can use them? They just waste the money.

She referred to the practice of corruption in the system where funds are not utilized fully for what they are meant. As a result, though toilets are erected as per the provision, they do not function. This was made clear when she said, 'Yes, the engineers of the department and the administrators all are involved. I would say, all are corrupt, all are

having their share in it'. She was the only person who made such open allegations against the officials of the school education department. The immediate need to restrain the corruption that pervades the system was highlighted by Meera who felt that corrupt officials meant that the benefits did not reach the intended beneficiaries, the pupils:

> The government has to see the implementation part of these schemes. The implementation of programmes is not proper due to the corrupt middle men. These middle men, for their own gain, do not allow the programme to run properly. They eat away the money and the poor pupils, they suffer, the benefits do not reach them.

To make her point more explicit, she gave the following example:

> In the girls' hostels when we see a lot of facilities that are supposed to be provided to the girls but actually they do not reach the girls residing in the hostels, we have to fight a lot to give them what is their right to get. The actual situation is something else. Everybody wants to have their own share or percentage in that. There is delay in sanctioning the funds, files do not get cleared on time, and funds do not arrive on time so implementation gets affected. The delay in implementation gives space to corruption. We should always check whether girls in hostels are getting their things or not.

She thought corruption was the root cause of all problems. Despite being a government officer herself she did not identify herself with this as evidenced in her phrase, '*the government* has to see …'. For her, the government was something else. She felt herself powerless to instigate any improvement in the system and said, 'There should be improvement in this. I do not know how to improve this, it is a very big problem'. The spread of corruption in education system from the top to the grassroots has been highlighted by many researchers (Jha and Jhingran, 2005; Heyneman, 2004; Jahan, Ramachandran, Belbase, *et al*. 1998; Bennett, n. d.; and Cohen, Bloom and Malin, n. d.) who think that it is corruption which makes the already weakened system weaker by diverting funds from school supplies. For example, Jahan, Ramachandran, Belbase, *et al*. observed that the majority of studies on girls' education suggested to 'weed out inefficiency and corruption in the incentives programmes and ensure that incentives meant for girls actually reach them' (1998: 17). Jha and Jhingran, in their study found 'mismanagement', 'delay' and 'corruption' in the distribution of incentives (2005: 73). Adiga highlighted corruption prevalent in the education system of India:

> There was supposed to be free food at my school – a government programme gave every boy [children] three *rotis*, yellow *daal* [lentils], and pickles at lunchtime. But we never saw *rotis*, or yellow *daal*, or pickles, and everyone knew why: the schoolteacher had stolen our lunch money. […] Once, a truck

came into the school with uniforms that the government had sent for us; we never saw them, but a week later they turned up for sale in the neighbouring village. (2008: 32-33)

Everyone within and outside the system seems to be aware of the prevalence of corrupt practices but no one appeared to feel in charge of doing anything to prevent it.

What the administrators say about the teachers' position and functioning

The teachers pointed out that other than teaching they had a lot of work to do which prevented them from delivering their best. Though they did not associate this directly with girls' non-participation in school they thought the administrators and the department were to be blamed for this situation. The administrators reacted differently to this issue. Nitin said:

> [The schools] open on time and run for the entire period also, but if the teacher has any other work such as some information to be given, some non-academic work, then they are helpless, they have to close the school before time.

His claim that schools opened on time was in total contradiction to what the parents had observed. Dhanraj's perception of the presence and regularity of teachers in school did not chime with that of the parents':

> No problem with that, all the schools are running very well, opening on time, all the teachers are coming to the school on time, it is a different thing that some teachers get late by three, four or five minutes some days, otherwise no problem with that. The children are so keen that they come earlier than the teachers, everything is going on perfectly.

Dhanraj tried to depict a perfect scenario. Nevertheless, his assertion, 'the children come earlier than the teacher' was suggestive enough that teachers were habituated to come late. As cluster level co-ordinators, it was the responsibility of both Nitin and Dhanraj to ensure the regular and timely opening of schools in their respective cluster. But the above comments suggest that either the co-ordinators had no idea what was going on at village/school level or they turned a blind eye towards it. As they themselves were basically teachers, they possibly had good reasons to avoid confronting these issues.

Nitin also tried to justify the action of the teachers' closing down the school during school hours. For him, this was not a very big issue. This was indicated when he said

very casually that this happened, 'Not many days, very few, two to four days in a month at the most'. Effectively, he substantiated what the teachers had said:

> There are several non-teaching tasks which the teachers have to do such as conducting survey, census, etc. That takes around 15 days. There are so many tasks like this, and the training, from the year 2000 a lot of training has been organised, teachers have to go for that, the training for the total sanitation programme is going on at the moment for them. If the teacher is here [at the BRC for training] then the work at the village and school level will certainly be affected. In my view if we leave teachers free of these tasks, then the level of education would be better.

Rajesh too stressed the involvement of teachers in non-academic activities. He thought it affected the teaching-learning:

> The main problem in this regard is employing the teachers in non-academic work, not only for a few days but for a longer period. This is a very big problem. Due to this there is break in the teaching-learning process and because of this children and teachers develop disinterest towards teaching. As they are put to work for other things they start making excuses and remain absent from the school. He becomes habituated to doing other works than teaching, and then his time management also gets affected. The continuity gets affected, he starts enjoying the work outside the school and does only that. In the primary schools the children are very small and they come from families who are not educated at all so the teacher takes advantage of this, but the percentage of this type of schools is only ten percent or so, not more than that. Not that they neglect children completely but there is a need to improve the situation.

Although not very explicitly, his assertion that teachers use the excuse of non-teaching tasks to remain absent from school made it clear that the administrators were aware of the situation. In this regard too Rajesh sounded defensive by saying that such a situation prevailed only in ten percent of the schools which for him was not a matter of concern. But Meera pointed out the casual approach of teachers towards their duties. She said:

> There are many teachers who teach very well but many teachers are also there who don't get connected with the students, don't care for the students and only think of themselves. … They also struggle with their day-to-day problems, for example, coping with the load of furnishing information to the higher offices, doing non-academic work. They are unable to manage parents who are not sending their girls to school, neither are they skilled nor do they have the attitude for this.

Though she did not deny the problem of the teachers' workload of non-teaching tasks, she first pointed towards the fact that the majority of teachers did not take their duties seriously. Her statement also questioned the capacity as well as mentality of teachers in

dealing with the situation to increase girls' participation in school. This indicates issues of policy in the selection of teachers and the inputs provided by the system in the form of training to equip them to carry out their tasks.

Dhanraj, who was very defensive about the teachers initially, also commented on the appointment policy for teachers but in a different way:

> The type of teachers they [the department] are employing now, the contract teachers and all, they are not very strong in the subject areas, they are not from the mathematics faculty, what will they teach? The parents understand this, they understand that there is no benefit in going to school, their children are not achieving anything so they are not sending their wards. Some development is needed in this area.

Dhanraj was furious about the change of state policy regarding the appointment of para-teachers in place of regular[67] teachers. Though he was critical of the performance of teachers, he pointed his fingers only at the para-teachers and was very defensive towards regular teachers. He himself was a regular teacher; probably this made him take this dual stand. He thought para-teachers were unable to handle the classroom and the subject areas and therefore parents lost faith in schools and teachers. Once again he contradicted his own previous view that children and thereby their parents did not understand 'what quality teaching is'. He also suggested that I do research on 'why the government changed the policy of the appointment of regular teachers and replaced them with para-teachers'. The shortage of mathematics teachers which he highlighted sounded a genuine one. According to him, as there were no teachers with a mathematics background even in middle schools, expecting achievement in children was unrealistic. Teaching English also seemed to be problematic. Dhanraj said:

> For example English, the English book is of so high a standard that even the teachers are not able to understand it, most of them have not studied English themselves so how can they teach that? The contents of the book are so much that the children are not able to finish it in one year.

As was made clear by Dhanraj, teaching English by teachers (including both regular and para-teachers) who had not studied English as a subject during their schooling was a real

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[67]From 1995-96, regular teachers' appointment on a permanent basis in Madhya Pradesh was substituted by recruiting para-teachers on contract. Thus the cadre of regular teachers has been done away with by declaring it a dying cadre. Instead, para-teachers are recruited with a meagre remuneration in comparison to that of regular teachers.

struggle. Undergoing a few sessions of training on how to transmit the book was not enough for those with no basic knowledge of the subject.

He also indicated that as part of their academic activities a lot of teachers' time was spent filling in forms. He gave an example of this:

> Recently there was a training regarding competency-based teaching. In this the teacher has to fill in three forms for each child to record the growth of competencies. You imagine if a teacher has 50 to 80 children how long will it take to fill this in, when will he do that? When will he form groups and teach, if he is able to form the groups, also where is the space for them to sit in groups? So the teaching gets affected. What I mean is, the paperwork for teachers should be minimised.

Ramachandran, Pal, Jain, *et al*. (2005) identified the pressure on teachers to fill in forms and provide data as a de-motivating factor. The teachers in their study highlighted what is called a 'negative trend' in education in the last decade, an 'increase in pressure to provide all kinds of data – household survey, disabled children, out-of-school children and immunisation-related information. Constant pressure to provide different kinds [of] information (toilets, water, crops, cattle)' (2005: 27). Nitin too hinted at the substantial increase of pressure on data generation with the commencement of the DPEP when he said, 'From 1997-89 onwards it [gathering information] has become too much'. Here we see the effect of certain western development policies[68] that emphasize bureaucracy as part of their accounting processes. Whilst stressing reducing paperwork, what Dhanraj termed an 'unnecessary' work load for teachers, he also pointed to the problem of infrastructure in schools. Though he had the opinion that all the schools in his cluster were well equipped and had all the facilities, in the above statement he acknowledged the lack of space in schools to carry out activities for children.

Unlike Dhanraj, who indicated policy issues, Arvind found no loop holes at the level of policy. For him it was the implementation which needed to be strengthened. He put teachers at the core of the success or failure of the efforts initiated by the government:

> Whatever the government does there will be no impact till there is a strong bond between the teacher and students. There will be no success till the

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[68]As the DPEP was funded by the World Bank and the European Union it carried with it a western philosophy including that of the development of a database as a part of the accounting process and thus much emphasis was given to the collection of data at all levels.

teacher is thinking that teaching and the students are his responsibility and he has to teach. The relation between the teacher and student has to be very strong, the students should have respect for the teacher which was there in the past. If this does not happen, then whatever the government does will not bring results.

Arvind made it explicit that unless and until teachers realized their duties and carried them out honestly no change could be expected. He again reiterated that improvement at policy level was fruitless and not desirable at the moment. He said:

Policy, in my opinion, is not of much importance here for education. What is important, is the inter-relation between the provider, the teacher and the students and their parents. How strong is their relation, that is more important. … In recent times … facilities have been increased, funds are available, infrastructure facilities are there, now the most important thing is the teacher's commitment towards the children and the community, society. This part has to be revisited. Teachers' performance is still not satisfactory because they are not satisfied with their profession. If they are not satisfied then we cannot achieve the desired goal of ours.

As he made clear, all other aspects to improve the present scenario of elementary education and to promote girls' education, had been taken care of such as financial support and infrastructure facilities, but the devotion of the teachers towards their profession needed to be strengthened. Arvind identified a loss of faith in the system as the reason for the lack of commitment amongst teachers. He said, 'Teachers have lost faith in the government, the administration and the department'. He argued that the core issue was a lack of commitment from the teachers and at the same time he made the education department, the government and the administration, of which he himself was a part, responsible for this. Arvind went on to narrate why teachers had lost faith in the system:

Teachers do not know what they will do tomorrow, they prepare a plan that they will teach a particular topic in class the next day, then he gets an order the next day that he has to go and attend a training programme, or a meeting or has to do a survey or duty in the election. There are teachers, at least there will be 20 percent of the teachers in any district who are very good, they want to do good work, but when they are not able to teach and are unable to do things according to their plan, then they get discouraged and disinterested and slowly they lose interest in their work. I mean, they are not getting enough support from the system.

He agreed with his subordinates that the sheer amount of non-teaching tasks given to teachers was a major obstacle in achieving the goals of education for all. He, along with the other administrators, even saw the training of teachers and meetings as distracting elements and acknowledged the fact that the teachers were made to follow orders on a

day-to-day basis. Dyer (1996), in her study conducted in another state of India found similar circumstances where teachers were mere followers of orders from the higher authority. She argues:

> Everything that teachers have to do is laid down by a higher authority, which does not consult teachers on any issues however teachers might be affected, […] the overall tendency is that the system does not treat a teacher as a professional educator [...]. (1996: 37)

Thus instead of leaving the teacher to teach the government employs them in whatsoever ways it considers necessary. Teachers, being the most powerless in the education hierarchy (Kumar, 1990), in turn do what they are told. Although Arvind strongly felt that something needed to be done to free teachers from non-teaching tasks he was also careful to defend the government:

> The government also tries to make sure that teachers are in the school and teach, but I think the government is helpless in this regard, whether it is the monitoring of *gyara sutri karyakram*, the 11 points programme[69] or up-dating of electoral list or any monitoring like that, at the village level, government is helpless, it has to use the help of teachers, it has no other option.

He defended the government by saying that it needed to use the teachers for administrative purposes. As the teacher is the only government representative at village level, he/she is made to carry out all odd jobs for the government including all its departments. Additionally, during election time and for other election-related work, which requires massive manpower, teachers are called in as no other department has such a large number of functionaries.

For the government sparing a few school days is not a very big concern but it does affect the procedure of the school in the long run. In Arvind's words:

> They think, ok, it is a matter of four, six or eight days only, let the teachers do it, but that four, six or eight days of engagement of teachers diverts their attention and interest. And then teachers also start taking advantage of it, they do not teach in schools, they make the excuse that they are involved in other activities.

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[69]The *Gyara sutri karyakram* (11 points programme) is a monitoring system designed by the state government to monitor the progress of 11 major government schemes (comprising various departments of the government) on a monthly basis. The monitoring of the 11 points programme is entrusted to the teachers and the *Janshikshaks* as they are the only government employees who can cover each and every village of the state.

He supported other administrators' demands regarding the freeing of the teachers from other tasks and allowing them only to teach. Though the administrators at a different level had their own perceptions, influenced by their own positioning in the system, regarding the functioning of teachers, they all agreed on this point. As Meera said categorically:

> One thing we should do is, we should make the teacher teach. They are doing all kinds of other work than teaching, even they themselves say that 'we are doing everything but teach'. All other work should be stopped and the teachers should be made only to teach in school.

What did the administrators do to counter barriers to girls' education?

With the above understanding that the administrators had of the education system, existing barriers to girls' education and the positioning of teachers in the system, it was interesting to note the initiatives taken by them to counteract and improve the present scenario.

Nitin endorsed all the schemes of the government and believed that these schemes were all very effective in bringing the girls into the fold of education:

> All the schemes are very effective and responsible for motivating parents to send their daughter to school. They [parents] are attracted to the school these days because of these facilities. All these facilities help in promoting the education of girls. Every scheme has its own contribution in promoting girls' education.

While condoning the government schemes he thought that he could not give one hundred percent to this cause. This was irrespective of the fact that the quality of the teaching in schools, according to him, was crucial for the retention of the children in school:

> Actually the *Janshikshak*'s work is giving academic support to the teachers. But we are not able to do our actual work. We also have too much other work to do such as bringing and distributing textbooks, visiting schools and gathering information about different schemes from time to time, for example on the *Sishushiksha Kendra* [crèche], the mid-day meal, etc. The orders come from the higher authority so we have to do this, we have to travel a lot to far-off places for this job. We go to schools and bring information and pass it on to the higher authority, so in this process what happens is we don't get time to provide academic support.

Though gathering information from schools was one of the major responsibilities of the CACs, as indicated by Nitin, they did nothing but this. Ramachandran, Pal, Jain, *et al*. (2005) in their study in Rajasthan, India found a similar situation. The teachers in their

study reported that the supervisors simply collected data on enrolment and other aspects of schooling on their visit to schools. Ramachandran and Saihjee's (2002) previous research in Chhattisgarh, another state of India, also supported this. They found the CACs as 'guardians of data and records' who did not provide 'sustained or regular academic inputs' to the teachers (2002: 1608). Nitin said that they were not in a position to create a database for all the required information as most of the time a new different set of data was asked for. He said, 'the information they ask for is such that we have to go'. He was not in a position to do any work of an academic nature in the school during his visit as gathering data became his first priority, 'Yes, we go but we cannot do any academic work, we go and ask for information, and go to another school, then come back, compile it and send it to the block office'. He felt very strongly that if data generation was not the CACs' responsibility, they could actually contribute a lot. He said, 'Certainly, gathering information takes a lot of our time, if that was not there then we could deliver more academically'. He never talked just about himself and always added his fellow CACs by using terms such as 'we', 'us' and 'our'. Bhagchand, the teacher, substantiated the pattern of school supervision by the CACs described by Nitin and said:

> He [*Janshikshak*] has got a lot of responsibilities, he has to collect a lot of information from the schools which are under him. He has no time to listen to or discuss the problems that we have. He just comes and asks for the information by saying 'give me the information, I have to go here and then there, I have no time, so quickly just give me the information, I have to collect all this and reach the office of the BEO'. So he is unable to do anything else other than collecting information.

Ramachandran described the trend of gathering only information by CACs when she said, 'the supervisors are busy counting children and supplies' (2001b: 16). Similar to the teachers the CACs appeared to be doing other things than what they were supposed to do, that is providing academic support to teachers and schools. It can be argued that data generation, that is the means to augment the quality of education in general and girls' education in particular, became an end in itself not only for the administrators but for the entire system.

Dhanraj claimed that girls' enrolment had increased due to the constant efforts made by him and the teachers. His account of their efforts was:

> … we work in two different ways: if a girl drops out then we send a message through the neighbouring children to their family and then we bring up the matter during the PTA meetings, sometimes teachers also go to their house.

He, in a way, repeated what the teachers had already mentioned. He was quite satisfied with the girls' enrolment scenario in his cluster and was not very much concerned with the girls' retention in school. This was evident when he said with some pride, 'Yes, there is no un-enrolled child in this area, there may be dropouts'. For him the mere name of a child on the school register was enough to consider him/her enrolled. He made this clear by saying, 'if the child's name is in the school [register], she has come to the school, she will be considered as enrolled, she may drop out after that'. His repeated mention that 'there may be drop outs' and 'she may drop out' was enough to indicate the prevalent practice teachers adopt, that is enrolling the name of the girl and allowing her to stay at home. This was effectively supported by the CACs. He again tried to defend his and the teachers' acts in this:

> They are enrolled but then they drop out. What can the teacher do? Either he can teach or go to children's house every day. And there is a lot of pressure on the teachers and us to show hundred percent enrolment, so we have to achieve the enrolment, but retaining children in school is a problem.

He ultimately came out with the truth that due to the pressure from the higher authority[70] the teachers took care to enrol the children's names including all girls of school-going age. This seemed to be easy to achieve as they just had to add the name in the school register. As bringing the child, and more specifically girls, literally to school and keeping them there was a daunting task and process, they refrained from doing it. Roy and Khan (2003) have drawn attention to the tendency to manipulate data and to false reporting by saying, 'the pressure to declare the programme a success encouraged more positive reporting of results than was warranted' (2003: n. p.).

Though all the administrators, irrespective of their level in the district, recognized the impact of the incentives provided to the children and girls as very positive for enrolling them, they all agreed that these incentives did not contribute strongly to keeping girls in school. For instance, Dhanraj said:

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[70]Higher authority includes officials of education department at cluster, block, district, state and the central level, each exerting pressure on the other down the line to meet the targets.

> They are all good and are effective but do not make any strong impact on the retention of children. Books are given once a year, food also, they like it but if it is not given, they can also have it at their home, that has not much to do with the retention.

Nitin stressed the need to campaign and motivate parents:

> We have to do a lot of campaigning, have to contact parents continuously, motivate them and make them understand or make it compulsory that the parents have to send their children to schools. The main thing is if we change this mentality of the society then it will change the present situation. We need to motivate them so that they will also motivate their girls and even the girls will be self-motivated. We have to try till we get all girls enrolled in school.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Arvind was of the opinion that the bond between the teacher and the students and the school and the community had to be strengthened and that this in turn would bring all girls to school. Though they all professed the importance of this, none of them seemed to do any of it. They articulated the difficulties they faced in doing so, in delivering their best to the system. Nitin suffered from too much data gathering which prevented him from carrying out his actual job that is, academic support to the schools. Arvind thought that the implementation aspect needed to be strengthened, but he too felt helpless to do so.

> Arvind: The implementation of the programmes has not been done properly, we have to look into this more closely. A lot of funds are made available for the activities but so far they are not running very well. Because of this girls are not getting the benefit of it.
> Q: What is the reason for this?
> Arvind: No particular reason, small lapses in implementation, files get delayed, do not get cleared in time, resource persons are busy with some other activities, they are very small things but do matter. They are not big issues but care has to be taken to finish things in time to achieve targets. But most of the time things are not in my hands, there are ECO [chief executive officer] and the collector and of course the public representatives who have to be sensitive enough towards the timely implementation of the programmes.

Arvind acknowledged that there were lapses in implementation which, according to him, were due to minor issues. But at the same time he felt powerless, despite the fact that he was the head of the district office, to implement the education department's programmes at district level. The decisions taken in the district are dependent on the collector[71] and

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[71]The collector is the administrative head of the district and also the ex-officio head of the district unit of the education department. This post is filled by officers from the Indian Administrative Service, comprising the top most administrators.

the chief executive officer[72] of the district who clear all the files. Delay in clearing the files leads to disruption in the process of implementation. The role of the public representatives in this endeavour was important. According to Arvind:

> The coordination between the implementer and the public representatives, the inter-relation between them is very important. If there is good coordination between these two the work also becomes smooth and the achievement is visible, but where there is less or no co-ordination between them, then the implementation becomes a problem.

Although Arvind could not say much about the reason for the lack of co-ordination between himself, the implementer, and the public representatives, he firmly believed that political support from the public representatives was a must to run the programme successfully. As he put it, 'public representatives should not become a hurdle and barrier in the process of the implementation of the programme'. Circuitously he put a lot of emphasis on the role of the public representatives who can be an obstacle in the process of implementation for their own benefits.

> They have competition among themselves, sometimes because of a tug of war between them the programme suffers. For example, if there are four public representatives working in the same area, same block for instance and they are coordinated then there is no problem in implementing the schemes but in case there is no co-ordination among them, they want to establish their own supremacy and want to take all the credit for the work and want to do it in their own way then the problem starts, the implementation gets delayed. And because of the delay in implementation, the desired outcome and the impact of it are not visible in the field.

The co-ordination between the public representatives of the area was thus critical for the smooth functioning of any programme. As he rightly indicated, caught between the claims of the public representatives and the administrators, the implementation of the programme suffered and thereby the education of the girls. The public representatives were concerned with their self-interest and the administrators had the tendency to do everything to please the public representatives for their own survival in the system. Thus no one had the time or inclination to promote girls' education. Again it was the girls who suffered.

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[72]The chief executive officer is the next in line to the collector to coordinate and execute the programmes of the government in the district.

The administrators' accounts suggested that there was a major gap between the education policy and its implementation. The policy, however impressive it may look, can yield nothing in the absence of a tangible implementation phase. Much attention is paid to the formulation of the policy as it is regarded as important and carried out by officials at the higher level of the power pyramid (Ganapathy, as cited in Dyer, 1999: 45). Grindle and Thomas argue that it is the tendency 'to assume that decisions to bring about change automatically result in changed policy' (as cited in Dyer, 1999: 45). Such perceptions amongst policy makers made them neglect a vital aspect of planning, namely implementation. Lack of implementation is not particular to Ratlam or India. It was also observed in 19 developing countries by Verspoor (1992) while reviewing the educational programmes there.

Other than motivating parents and accomplishing better co-ordination with public representatives, the administrators also suggested some punitive measures to improve the situation. For example Nitin thought the government should compel parents to send their children to school:

> If some kind of rule is made for the parents that it is compulsory to send their children to school even if they do not want to, then the situation can change.

When I reminded him of the provision[73] of the JSA 2002 on this he observed that the mere enactment of a law without its proper enforcement would not yield any results. Thus he suggested there had to be firm action against parents for not sending their girls to school:

> The Act is there, but the majority of parents in the rural areas do not know about it or don't take it very seriously. Rules are made but the implementation of the provisions is not done in a proper way. If they implement them correctly then the parents have to send the girls to school even though they don't want to. Some kind of punishment, uh…..not punishment but if they are forced to send their children then I think it would work. If the government reduced the facilities provided to the parents such as the facility through the ration card and other programmes, then they would be afraid and send their children. It may make some impact.

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[73]According to the sub-section (1) of clause 22 of Jan Shiksha Adhiniyam 2002 – '[i]t shall be the duty of every parent and guardian of a child of age group of 5 to 14 years to ensure that his child is enrolled and he regularly attends the school and completes elementary education' (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2002b, 804(14)) . In case a parent or guardian violates the above sub-section, he/she can be punished by the *Gram Sabha* or the local body who can impose a fine.

Presumably he did not imagine any role for himself in this process of implementation though he was one of the key implementers at the grassroots level. This was suggested when he said 'if *they* implement'. He also made it clear that the existing rules if implemented in their true sense would yield appropriate results. There was no visible effort from his side to implement the provisions of the Act. Rather, he suggested to curtail the benefits families enjoy to make the parents behave in accordance with the government's wishes though he was not very sure of the impact of this either. His counterpart, Dhanraj, had the same opinion:

> Dhanraj: In my view one more thing should be done in this regard. The government should stop all other benefits to parents who are not sending their children to school. If this is done then the parents will send their children to school.
> Q: Which other benefits are you talking about?
> Dhanraj: The ration card facility, BPL card and other government schemes. If there is a condition like this, the parents will send. But it cannot be implemented as this is a political issue and no government will do this. It is very difficult.

Along with the ration card which helps families to get their provisions at a reduced price, Dhanraj also recommended to withdraw the facilities provided to the families living below the poverty line. The administrators suggested making all the government facilities conditional on the fact that families send their children to school. They came out with this proposal even though they knew the feasibility of this was remote due to its political dimensions. They seemed to suggest new measures but did not pay any attention to implementing the existing ones. The consolidation of the existing interventions and their proper implementation however would prove beneficial in bringing girls to school and retaining them there.

Action at the school, specifically the teacher, level was suggested by the gender co-ordinator to improve girls' education and the overall scenario of education.

> There should be some sort of grading of the teachers, and it should be done by the children of the concerned school. The teachers who secure unsatisfactory grades should be given counselling. If there is any further degradation then they should be punished. By this, if the students are evaluating, the teachers would themselves realise why their grades are going down and it would make them perform better. This may also give them motivation to work harder.

Nitin and Dhanraj, who were basically teachers, urged punishing parents for not sending their children to school. Meera on the other hand advocated punishment for teachers though she believed that non-performing teachers should be counselled first and action against them should be the last resort. It was perhaps easy for the teachers to blame and put all the responsibilities on parents and the administrators to do the same regarding the teachers. Each tried to point the finger at the person down the line, not recognizing or purposefully avoiding reforms needed at their own level. For all, the problems did not lie with them but with the others. Blame-shifting was the norm.

All the administrators displayed their powerlessness and helplessness at some point or other. For all of them, irrespective of their level of operation, the power to initiate change, bring improvement or even implement the provisions of the government in their true sense was invested in a higher authority and certainly not with them. This perception prevented them from initiating any action of their own to promote change. Instead they preferred to follow the instructions from the higher-ups or even manipulate the instructions given to them to concentrate on the easier tasks, avoiding the ones involving higher levels of commitment and dedication. Ramachandran argued, 'the district administrators only follow orders, and even the state government officers have little autonomy to steer educational programmes' (2001b: 16). Thus it was tasks such as the opening of girls' hostels, the distribution of incentives, filling in forms, furnishing data and so forth, which became significant and not the overall goal and vision of the state to ensure all girls' participation in school.

Conclusions

The administrators I interviewed displayed a sense of non-recognition of gender norms and power relations between the teachers, the parents and the girls and a limited understanding of their role in the process of facilitating girls' education. They spoke about their role providing *in situ* academic support to teachers, communicating with parents to persuade them to send their daughters to school and ensuring the proper implementation of the government's provisions to promote girls' education. While giving an account of the measures taken by their respective institutions to promote girls' education they focussed predominantly on the provision of incentives and a few temporary measures such as free uniforms and bicycles, girls' hostels and bridge courses.

Only the DPC and one CAC mentioned measures such as community mobilization, reaching out to the parents and motivating them. Developing a strong bond between teachers and students and school and community were also highlighted. It appeared that the goals of education for all and the vision of the state in promoting girls' education was understood only by the DPC who as the district level functionary had greater interface with state level officials as he was the one often called to the state office to attend meetings and other related forums. All the other administrators including the gender co-ordinator had a limited vision of the role played by their office and themselves. As the overall vision of the endeavour was not clear to the functionaries it was not surprising that they worked at bits and pieces, and resorted to the tasks as and when entrusted to them by the authority.

Regarding the existing barriers that prevent girls from entering school or remaining there once entered, the administrators repeated what the teachers had articulated. For example, they referred to the mentality of the parents who think traditionally and do not allow girls to attend school, the preference for sons owing to the prevalence of the patri-local marriage system, gender stereotypes, perceiving grown-up girls as assets at home for carrying out household chores and their involvement in economic activities, the fear of the parents to let grown-up girls go out alone to attend school and the poor economic condition of the parents which they thought were detrimental to girls' education. Along with these factors the absence of female teachers and toilets for girls in school were also emphasised by the administrators. For them, as regards the infrastructure, the availability of toilets in schools was crucial. In contrast the parents did not mention that providing a toilet would encourage them to send their daughters to school. For the parents, more than a toilet, the availability of more as well as spacious classrooms and drinking water were crucial. The administrators seemed to perceive things differently than the parents as for them condoning the existing provisions of the education department was more important than the actual needs of the users. Participative democracy was lacking despite the state's claim of adopting a participatory and micro-planning process for the development of its annual plan. Though the state-level document proclaims the use of a bottom-up approach for planning by involving the PTA (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2008a: 13) and other stakeholders of education, the findings from the grassroots did not match this rhetoric. This certainly calls for more consultation, as well as action in accordance with

the real needs expressed by the villagers rather than delivering what the education department has up its sleeves.

The importance of the presence of a woman teacher in school was accentuated by the district level officials. They thought this would eliminate parents' fear regarding the safety of their daughter in school and would build confidence among them to send their daughters. Although the parents did not demand female teachers, they were sceptical about the safety of their daughters in school. Overall, these findings suggest that more women teachers, especially in the rural areas, might bring about positive change by providing role models for parents and girls and at the same time freeing them from the fear of sexual harassment at school.

As indicated by the DPC, an academically stimulating atmosphere at school which is core to attracting children including girls was missing. Though some of the girls viewed school as a place for meeting their friends and thus were happy, they complained about the teaching-learning atmosphere provided in school. Schools were rather perceived as dull where children did not feel happy; they feared the teachers and thus did not stay. There is clearly a need for improving the academic culture of schools as indicated by the DPC. The quality of teaching in schools was variable to say the least and undermined the retention of girls. Although all the administrators agreed unanimously on this, they had their own understanding of this. The cluster and the block level officials thought in their area there were no such problems and almost all the schools were performing very well. With a little probe one of the cluster co-ordinators thought it was the women teachers who neglected their duties, even though the number of women teachers working in rural areas was far less than the male teachers and incongruously there were no women teachers in my sample. He also questioned the abilities of para-teachers to handle teaching in school as according to him regular teachers were the best to take up the endeavour of education. The lack of subject teachers of mathematics in middle schools and the inability of teachers to teach English as a subject which they themselves were not taught made the process of teaching-learning daunting. As a result teachers avoided teaching, students did not learn much and thus parents ultimately thought it better for girls not to waste time in school though they wanted their sons to stick to it in the hope of getting some sort of job or starting a business in future.

All the administrators empathized with the teachers regarding their involvement in non-academic activities. The use of teachers in non-academic tasks distracts them from their main job and with the excuse of this, teachers avoid teaching or even coming to school. This in turn discourages parents from sending their daughters to school. They suggested that along with non-academic assignments all the unnecessary paperwork done by teachers should be stopped although they all viewed this was not going to happen due to political pressure.

As the cluster level officials were basically teachers themselves they tended to defend the teachers and seemed to be sympathetic towards them. They brought up systemic issues that prevent teachers from attending to their duties. At the same time district level officials observed a lack of skill, commitment and dedication amongst the teachers. If not wholly, they held teachers partially responsible for the deterioration of the quality of schools. The block co-ordinator just as the cluster level officials seemed to be satisfied with the present educational situation and thought that aiming for a perfect situation was like aiming for a utopian state. This state of contentedness amongst officials prevented them from identifying factors hindering girls' education and striving for improvement. As a result girls remained out of school though they were officially enrolled. The perception of enrolment and retention amongst officials especially at the cluster level was an aspect of concern. Because of pressure from above, as they said, the teachers tended to record all girls of school-going age as enrolled. This was also approved by the administrators. This was their way of avoiding the harsh ground realities and of saving their position. Consequently it was the name of the girls which remained on the school register and not the girls themselves.

Whilst discussing their efforts to increase girls' participation in education they all focussed on providing free uniforms, free textbooks, cycles, separate toilets for girls, bridge courses and girls' hostels, irrespective of the fact that these incentives, as observed by them, were not very helpful in retaining girls in school. Interestingly enough, the provision of bridge courses and girls' hostels are temporary measures. The administrators seemed to give most importance to these incentives and the temporary measures, and in the process neglected the schools, the core institution to provide mainstream education. It

can be argued that the administrators seemed to perform their duties on a routine basis without any effort to modify the system despite the fact that they, at certain points, realized that the problem lies within the delivery system. Second, like the teachers, the administrators too concentrated on just delivering the tasks assigned to them by their superiors. Third, they felt in no position to act according to the needs and requirements of the area or to do something different than the prescribed tasks to meet the demands. No one appeared to feel that they were in charge. Fourth, in the absence of their own initiatives, they either tended to concentrate on the aspects that were a priority for their authority or tried to avoid those issues that were daunting to deal with. Thus, they made little effort to improve the teaching-learning in schools or to mobilize the community. In the process of acting in accordance with the authority's priorities and giving attention to the relatively easier tasks the administrators' attention to the schools became less and less over time. As a result, teachers felt neglected, discouraged and de-motivated. This made the already resource-poor schools weaker so that they could not attract children, especially girls, to remain for long.

For the administrators punishment rather than reform was the best way to achieve the desired outcomes. The cluster level officials, probably because of their positioning as teachers basically recommended punishment for parents not sending their children to school, in the form of curtailing all benefits provided to them by the welfare state. They thought stopping all benefits which parents get through the ration card, the below-the-poverty-line card and any such thing would force parents to send their daughters to school even if they did not wish to do so. In contrast the district level official advocated punishment for the teachers although she also thought positive reinforcement should be given to deserving teachers. The administrators also propagated stopping corruption in the system and expressed their desire for greater support from public representatives as the absence of the former and presence of the latter, they thought, would facilitate a better implementation of the programme. Although the administrators showed some understanding of the existing barriers obstructing girls' education and suggested a few measures, they all felt powerless to initiate the process that would bring change.

Additionally, there was either no or very little mention of aspects such as the capacity building of teachers, motivating teachers, gender sensitization among teachers and

officials, ensuring the regular opening of schools and the presence of teachers in schools, ensuring regular and meaningful teaching-learning in schools, creating a vibrant, pleasant and attractive environment in school, community mobilisation and gaining the confidence of the community by establishing credibility. All the above mentioned issues actually had their place in the policy and programme documents of the education department. What was missing was the resolve to act. Bridging the gap between intention and action, as propagated by Jahan, Ramachandran, Belbase, *et al*. (1998) seemed to be the need of the hour. In the absence of firm action to transform the policy statements and provisions of the department into reality the desired change was not achieved. The commitment to act seemed to be missing at every level, from school to the district. Each functionary including the teachers thought the action for reform was not expected at their level, each one pointed the finger at the other in the attempt to defend themselves. The aspiration for all girls in school appeared to be trapped in this vicious circle of defending one's own position and blaming the other for inaction. As a consequence it was not surprising to find girls working in the fields and at home when they should have been in school.

Conclusions

This thesis has its origins in my professional experience whilst working for the state department for school education in Madhya Pradesh, India. As a member of the state level planning and implementation team, I engaged with the policies, programmes, strategies and interventions that were in place to bring all girls of school-going age into the fold of school education. Ironically, visiting rural schools I found a lack of correspondence between the policies and the reality at village level. I was discouraged by witnessing the lack of girls in the schools. That made me to wonder, 'why are the girls not in school?' even though the state had fulfilled its statutory responsibility to provide school places for its children. Through this PhD, I sought answers to this key question. I aimed to understand the lives of girls and women in rural areas in order to explore the link between their social positioning and their educational opportunities. The overarching concern of my study was to show why girls fail to benefit from the state's educational programmes despite the claim being made that gender parity, if not equality, has been achieved in elementary education in India. In this chapter I summarise how my findings relate to the relevant literature, and discuss their implications for education policy and future research.

The literature illustrates (King and Hill, 1993) that the initial debate on education emphasised the latter's contribution to enhancing the economic condition of the family and the nation. Education in general and girls' education in particular was viewed desirable for wealth creation and national development. Sen's (2000) capability approach and the human development paradigm marked a significant departure from this approach. Sen emphasized the intrinsic value of education for girls and women in addition to its instrumental value. For him, education should enable individuals to 'effectively shape their own destinies' (2000: 11). His capability approach calls for providing every individual with the foundations for economic, political and social participation to enable them to develop their capacities to live a life that they value. Sen argued that the provision of school and girls' and women's persistence through school or the achievement of literacy will lead to their empowerment.

The issue of equality and women's empowerment was made central to the debate on gender education from a global perspective due to the increased involvement of

international organisations such as UNESCO and World Bank in policy formulation in gender and education. Feminist scholars such as Arnot and Fennell (2008), Unterhalter (2005) and Subrahmanian (2002) also brought the crucial aspect of achieving gender equality in education to the current debate in gender and education. They argued that only providing access and striving for gender parity in education will not yield much result unless gender inequality and gender imbalance in society is addressed. Sen (2000) too acknowledged the complexity of the empowerment process and indicated that the provision of actual schools alone will not automatically result in girls' and women's empowerment. It has become clear that it is not enough to provide schools as these interventions have not resulted in significantly improving girls' participation (UNESCO, 2009; Unterhalter, 2003). This indicates that it is clearly not a single-issue matter and that an intersectional approach is needed. Minimising gender imbalances and inequality in society and providing a well-functioning school for girls so as to encourage their full participation in school education are equally important here.

The Indian educational policies were influenced by Sen's capability approach and were in line with the international goals (Page, 2005) such as MDGs. But the state's visions at national level, as I found in my research, failed to translate into programme initiatives and their proper implementation. These challenges affected the progress towards achieving the goals of gender equality in education in the state.

My investigation focused on the factors that prevented the meeting of the gender equity objectives in school education in India, specifically in Madhya Pradesh. The state of Madhya Pradesh itself regularly collects data on elementary education, more specifically girls' education, through an annual survey. It is carried out on a door-to-door basis, and provides quantitative information about the number of children of school-going age in a household, their enrolment status, and the reason for any non-enrolment or drop out. The survey lists a set number of reasons for children being out of school. The teacher selects one of the reasons for each out-of-school child in the process of the survey. These data present a particular scenario which, however, offers no detailed account of the reasons why girls find it difficult to use the educational opportunities provided by the government. Since the survey gives the impression that girls' enrolment and retention in schools is continuously improving and moving towards achieving the Millennium Development

Goals, I wanted to investigate how this picture compares with what happens on the ground. This was because I knew that the accuracy of these administrative data was in question (UNESCO, 2007), and indeed this was mirrored in my research.[74] Further, whilst reviewing previous studies conducted in various parts of India related to girls' education (Page, 2005a; Jha and Jhaingran, 2005; Rana and Das, 2004; Rajaram and Sunil, 2003; Ramachandran, 2003a and 2003b) what struck me most was that the state seemed to incorporate into its programmes all the suggestions that were put forth by these researchers. They included the provision of primary schools within walking distance from all habitations, child care facilities, incentives such as free textbooks and uniforms, and the involvement of the community in school management. Everything appeared to be taken care of by the policy formulators to increase girls' participation in education. Still, the set target of all children, including girls, in school by 2003 was missed by the state and has not been achieved to this date (2010). Therefore, to explore why girls are not in school despite these efforts by the state, I investigated the experiences of the front-line stakeholders of education including the parents of out-of-school girls, the out-of-school girls themselves, the teachers and the administrators from the education department. Listening to their perspectives gave me the opportunity to reassess the official claims and efforts pertaining to girls' education on the one hand, and the meaning and value people attach to girls' education on the other. In so doing, my study produces new understandings about girls' participation or rather, lack thereof, in elementary education.

In this context, my coming to the UK to explore what is happening in my home country helped me in two ways: first, it gave me the opportunity to learn about different aspects of feminist theories and approaches to qualitative research and this informed the direction of my research. Second, coming out of the government system proved advantageous in that I could perceive things more critically and from a more detached perspective. This would not have been possible had I taken up this study from within the government system. My exposure to UK academia supported my transition from administrator to researcher, from the role of edifying and enforcing, to that of listening and understanding matters from others' perspectives.

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[74]Irrespective of the state's claim of the availability of data related to each and every aspect of school education, on several occasions during my research I encountered situations where I found that these data were in fact not accurate or available. I have discussed this issue in detail in my methodology chapter.

At the initial stage, my premise was that there is a strong intersection between caste, economic status and locality in girls' inclusion or exclusion in/from education. For this reason I deliberately included families in my research that represented diverse castes,[75] economic statuses (families from APL and BPL category)[76] and locations (remote from and proximity to an urban centre)[77]. However, in my research I found no significant differences in the participants' responses (especially the parents') in terms of those categories. In contrast, the gender parameter was more prominent and visible in my research. The mothers' and the girls' responses and views on certain issues differed from the fathers'. For example, they gave different opinions on the importance of education in a girl's life. This, I believe, was owing to their subscription to a particular gender regime which operates in this geopolitical area. Consequently, I decided to remove the lenses of caste, economic status and location from my analysis and treated the families equally, only keeping the gender lenses intact. The families I interviewed all had girls that were not attending school and this particular situation and its associated issues in my view had greater valence in their responses than their social, economic, and locality differences.

The research questions that I formulated at the beginning of my research were influenced by my literature review – they focused on the facilities and incentives available in schools to promote girls' education although gender stereotyping and child marriage were also mentioned. In contrast, in my actual research it emerged that the social positioning of girls and women, the future role of girls as mothers and home makers and the usefulness of girls at home proved more detrimental to girls' education than the absence of facilities and incentives in schools as I discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. My findings, to certain extent, reflected Bourdieu's concept of social reproduction and habitus. The participants in my research, in some ways sub-consciously, were concerned about reproducing the gendered order of their society in the absence of a strong schooling system that challenges gender inequality.

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[75] I included families from four major social categories, i.e. the General Caste, Other Backward Classes, Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe.

[76] I did not find any major differences in their financial status between the families belonging to the APL and BPL categories. Families belonging to the APL category referred to similar economic constraints when considering their daughter's education as families belonging to the BPL categories.

[77] I selected two villages from remote locations and the other one for its close proximity to an urban setting. But eventually I realised that due to the increased mobility among villagers for work reasons the so-called remote villagers were also exposed to urban settlements and thereby their influence. As a result, I did not find any remarkable differences in their responses which could be attributed to the location of their village.

Reflections on theories and concepts

To understand my participants' context I used Bourdieu's theory of practice which emphasises social influence on individual behaviour and the role of culture in human activity. This was helpful for understanding the gender processes at play in parents', teachers' and administrators' decision-making regarding girls' absence from school, processes informed by long-standing traditions regarding gender roles that inform the habitus of my participants. The parents valued traditional practices such as girls' early marriage and gender role expectations and denied their daughters' participation in the public sphere such as a school. My study illustrated how culture mediated parents' and girls' aspirations in respect of schooling. According to Cole (1996), culture mediates human behaviour by linking society and its institutions at macro level, and individual thoughts and actions at micro level. My study demonstrated that gender role expectations influenced parents' and girls' aspirations for schooling. The barriers and challenges to girls' participation in school education were historical, social and structural in nature, and were anchored in the parents', girls', teachers' and administrators' views as reflected in their practices. This suggests the need for serious attention to be paid to the gender sensitization of community members and educational functionaries. Gender sensitisation needs to be made an integral part of every training programme. Activities such as role play, street play, audio visual presentations and group discussions, suitable for both literate and illiterate people, should be incorporated in training programmes to promote change in the gendered attitudes of community members and officials of education department.

Bourdieu's emphasis on social reproduction through the influence of habitual practices of everyday life has been criticised for portraying human behaviour as being unreflective, automatic-like and almost predetermined (Strauss, 1992). In my study the parents and the girls demonstrated, up to certain extent, their willingness to break through the set pattern of their society through desiring to be literate – thus having some agency. But this is also a very slow process which may be speeded up by additional state measures such as education for adult women. Educating women could boost their confidence in public-sphere participation and may increase their educational aspirations for their daughters.

Unlike Bourdieu, Sen's (2000) capability approach suggests that expansion of individual capabilities will lead to people's increased agency and capacity in making informed

choices and this increases individuals' wellbeing. Sen emphasises the importance of knowledge for initiating change processes. Thus he suggests providing the most enabling environments for individuals, both boys and girls, through education, considering that both its intrinsic and instrumental value are critical to informed choices.

The educational priorities in India and in Madhya Pradesh were influenced by Sen's capabilities approach to achieve gender equality (Page, 2005a). However, though Indian and Madhya Pradesh policy statements consider education a means towards self-liberation, greater autonomy and equality, I found that parents, girls, teachers and the administrators, all had an instrumental attitude towards education; they regarded it primarily as a means for obtaining a job. Education and indeed the denial of access to education was also considered to play an instrumental role in disciplining the body and minds of individuals to follow the hegemonic social system as outlined in Bourdieu's work.

Major findings and policy implications

The principal findings of my work relate to the embeddedness of unequal gender relations in Indian society. The predominance of the system of patriarchy in general and in the community I visited in particular, positions women at the bottom of the ladder and manifests itself in men's dominance, including in family decisions. In relation to women this meant, as I observed, a prevalence of what I would call a 'culture of silence', meaning that women felt unable to articulate their concerns because they were not expected to speak and their opinions did not count due to their cultural positioning. The particular familial expectations of women to attend mainly to domestic chores and to deal with the domestic needs of the family placed them in the private sphere of the 'home', limiting their access to the public domain. Women's confinement to the private realm and their persistent oppression made my female participants devalue themselves and their own opinions. They were raised with the conviction that they 'know nothing' because they are girls and women. This was indicative of the level of their disempowerment, a factor that was also highlighted in my literature review (Reinharz and Chase, 2003).They had no experience of being asked about their views, and therefore struggled to express these, given a chance. Some of my male participants (in particular the fathers) also devalued their own opinions, but the reason for this was their illiterate status rather than their gender. This meant that I had to coax people to articulate their opinions during the interviews. My research indicated a powerful need for improved adult education, both for women and for men. If parents are

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illiterate, they have little sense of what to expect from a school, and though they can see the social benefits of being literate, they cannot see that being literate might improve their ability to participate in other matters such as decisions about schools and schooling. However, it was clear that many of my interviewees had little idea of what to expect from their school on behalf of their children which meant, *inter alia*, that they could not exercise their rights, for instance in the PTA, in relation to that schooling.

It was clear in my research that parents attach differential meanings and relevance to school education in the life of a girl from that of a boy. Daughters were at a major disadvantage. As far as boys were concerned, education was perceived as a vehicle for the transition from hardship and suffering to fortuity and prosperity as it might provide them with a secure source of earning through a paid job. Herz (2006) found similar attitudes. Because of its perceived transformational role, education was considered essential in a boy's life. It is perhaps for this reason that the closeness of the school to home impacted positively on the enrolment of boys but I also found that the same did not hold true for girls. My study, in line with the literature I reviewed and in particular Ramachandran (2003a and 2003b), Aggarwal (2000) and Karlekar (2000), indicates that the proximity of the school to home, and therefore its easy access, did not ensure that all girls attend. This contradicted the state's perception that the proximity of a school to the habitation increases children's, boys' as well as girls', enrolment in school.

Education held a certain value for girls' lives though it had particular connotations for them. Thus education was attached to the better social positioning of girls where they would no longer be looked down upon because of their illiterate status. Some parents thought that education would broaden girls' understanding and empower them to negotiate in the public sphere. This was also observed by Page (2005a). From the mothers' perspectives the education of girls might lead to a certain equalization of the status of women with that of men in the family. Many girls recognized schooling as important though from quite a different angle than their parents. They wanted to be in school so as to play and talk with their friends. This indicated their desire to be with children of their own age-group and to unshackle themselves from the load of domestic chores they had to bear. At the same time they expressed their inability to influence their parents to allow them to

attend school. Their gender, alongside their childhood status, gave them no voice in the family. Whilst many parents and some out-of-school girls expressed their sense of obligation to adhere to traditional gender roles, they also, and sometimes in contradiction to this, expressed aspirations for a more liberated life. On the whole, however, parents valued girls' education at a theoretical level, but their sense, as Raynor (2005) also found, that school education had no relevance for girls' future roles as home makers and mothers was more influential in their decision-making about that education. This suggests that there might be a need for curriculum review, with the aim of creating a better match between the education that is delivered and girls' needs in their future lives. Overt links need to be made between the school curriculum and girls' lives, for instance through an additional focus on vocational skills.

In my study most of the mothers and some of the fathers were not aware of what their daughters were learning when they were in school. Yet parents' role in the schooling of girls was found to be very instrumental. The main reason they could not participate in their daughters' school affairs was because of their own illiterate status. The adverse impact of parents' illiteracy on their daughters' education have also been highlighted by Kurosaki, Ito, Fuwa, *et al*. (2006). This suggests that educational policies need to focus as much on adults as on children to achieve significant changes in the educational levels of the population as a whole. It also means that there should be a drive to sensitise parents to the importance of their involvement and participation in their children's activities in school, and to empower them with literacy skills. Adult literacy programmes for parents, especially mothers, should be encouraged. It is through such programmes that women may learn the language of the public sphere, and gain the courage to get involved in the schooling of their daughters. In India, adult literacy programmes have been in operation since 1978 in the form of the National Adult Education Programme (Ramachandran, 1999) which was revamped in 1988 to switch to a campaign mode, the Total Literacy Campaign, with a specific focus on women. However, Ramachandran (1999 and 2000) observed that though the initial response to this programme was overwhelming the euphoria died down very soon and was not sustained. Among the reasons for the failure of such programmes she cited: the lack of a proper monitoring system; corruption; the misutilisation of funds; the lack of a support system; and limited community support. My research illustrates that all these elements still persist in the system, hampering girls' education. Therefore, and in line with one of Ramachandran's (1999 and 2000) recommendations, the needs and

priorities of the women should be surveyed and ascertained before embarking on any adult literacy project and such programmes should not be considered as 'quick-fix' measures. Additionally, there is a clear need for measures to combat corruption and to ensure the implementation of policies.

The social positioning of girls and women, as my research reveals and Stephens (2000) argues, has far-reaching and detrimental consequences for girls' participation in education. As the goal of girls' lives is perceived to be getting married and joining their in-laws, from the beginning everything in girls' lives revolves around this goal. Girls are considered *parayadhan*, that is, the wealth or property of *others*. This status is the deciding factor which shapes their life from its very inception. As indicated in the relevant literature (Mishra, 2005; Raju, Atkins, Townsend, *et al*., 1999; Bhatty 1998; King and Hill 1993) the patri-local marriage system places girls in their in-laws' homes after marriage. Hence girls are not regarded as long-term members of the natal family. In contrast, boys are viewed as the future support system of their natal family and supposed to provide financial security and support to their parents in their old age. Educating sons is therefore perceived as an investment which will result in a better future for the parents. In contrast, sending girls to school is viewed as a lost investment for the natal family and thus avoided.

Parents' desire to adhere to traditional practices went together with a lack of agency amongst girls and women in the family and in society more generally as evidenced in my research. A girl's childhood comes with the awareness that 'in the eyes of the culture she is considered inferior to a boy' (Kakar, 1988: 50). Girls internalize the patriarchal values embedded in the larger society through a 'deliberate training in how to be a *good woman*, and hence the conscious inculcation of culturally designated feminine roles. She learns that the "virtues" of womanhood which will take her through life are submission and docility as well as skills and grace in the various household tasks' (Kakar, 1988: 51). All the female participants in my research articulated such experiences. Girls were repeatedly told that eventually they would have to serve their husband and his family, hence needed to be prepared for this; mothers took it as their responsibility to train their daughters to be perfectly skilled in domestic chores and be docile, as for them, these were the qualities which would bring a girl happiness in her later life.

The patri-local marriage system has additional implications beyond the investment angle, that affect girls' education (Thornton, 2006). My research indicates that, as girls are considered somebody else's property, parents take care to act as 'responsible custodians' until the girls are relocated into the in-laws' family. Parents believe that it is their responsibility to protect the girls before handing them over to their 'rightful owners' (Kakar, 1988 and Madan, 1993). Protecting girls becomes tantamount to not allowing them into the public domain, for example school. School is considered a place where girls may encounter the opposite sex and lose their virginity before marriage which is completely unacceptable in the Indian context. A 'bad' reputation may lead to a girl being abandoned by her in-laws. In such a case the girl is forced to return to the natal family for the rest of her life, and parents take care to avoid this situation as it reflects badly on the family's honour and finances. Thus, marriages are fixed at a very early age (e.g. at the age of three to seven), and girls are then 'protected' from being tempted into pre-marital sexual attractions.

All this implies that changing gender perceptions and commonsense assumptions is crucial. This could be furthered by enforcing more strongly the policies recruiting female teachers in rural communities and by exposing the communities to a very different female identity from the local ones in the form of female teachers. The appointment of at least one female teacher in each school should be ensured. This would provide an atmosphere where the community and girls may witness men and women working collaboratively and women challenge traditional gendered behaviour, thus modelling a more equitable gender practice.

Preparing girls for their future life with their in-laws overshadows the importance of school education. Kaul (2001) highlighted this. The girls in my research too indicated that their parents very consciously started the process whereby girls are brought up to understand that they have to take up household responsibilities in their husband's house and need to be prepared for that. They grow up with this traditional gendered notion which confirms the unequal gender relations embedded in wider Indian society. School education is not only considered irrelevant to a girl's life, it is also perceived as a potential threat to girls' traditional gender role and thus to be avoided. This too calls for introducing measures to combat the prevailing subordinate female identity. Apart from having dedicated female teachers, working with community leaders, religious leaders, and youth groups, who have

influence over the community, on changing cultural perceptions of gender is necessary to encourage gender-sensitive practices. Equal or even greater attention is needed in the area of community mobilisation which is absolutely lacking at the moment as indicated in my research.

My findings suggest that parents use and in a sense abuse the notion of orienting girls to their future role as home makers, as this process also creates a convenient context for the parents. In the name of preparing them for their future life, girls are frequently made to shoulder the household responsibilities of their parents. They take up domestic chores and in so doing, liberate their mothers from those tasks; they also take up wage-earning activities and share their parents' financial responsibilities. Girls' sharing the household chores and supposedly adding to the family income is a support to their parents and the latter tend not to do away with this by sending their daughters to school. Instead, they prefer to invest in their sons by sending them to school as this will, they believe, pay them back in their old age. Das (1962 in Kakar, 1988: 47) showed, and my research confirmed, that sons are considered the 'saviour of the family' whereas daughters, they believe, will not contribute to the natal family's income after marriage. Hence, parents are inclined to support their sons to study and girls have to pay heavily towards this. I would argue that in their quest for an improved and secured future, parents do not mind exploiting their daughters' present and future as well.

Parents' abject economic circumstances have been offered as a rationale for girls' non-participation in education and their involvement in wage-earning activities. This notion has been supported by a number of researchers as indicated in my literature review (Kumar, 2006b; Jha and Jhaingran, 2005; Rana and Das, 2004; Kaul, 2001; Colclough, Pauline and Tembon, 2000 and Epstein, 1998). However, digging below this surface, I found that in most of the cases I encountered, the girls' participation in wage-earning activities *replaced* the earnings of their parents and did not add to them. Mothers and even in some cases fathers stopped working completely or became irregular in their wage-earning labour as soon as the girls were made to work. In contrast, I found that the parents did not allow their sons to take up wage-earning activities which interfered with their attending school. Rather than poverty it is the 'negative attitudes' or less priority attached to girls' education which keeps girls away from school, a factor also pointed out by Dhagamwar (2006: 85).

Dhagamwar further observes that even families with better economic status believe that getting skilled in domestic chores is more beneficial for girls than being educated. Sibbons (1999) indicated, and my data confirmed, that rather than poverty, the cultural beliefs that promote early marriage and gender stereotypes are responsible for girls' low participation in education. My evidence suggests that poverty, in most instances, was used as a shield to mask parents' patriarchal values and tendency to cling to these. The desire to adhere to traditional views and practices was in contradiction to my interviewees' sense of change in the contemporary world, i.e. their expressed sense that more girls are and should be in education now, but their difficulty in moving with that change was explained by them in terms of their poverty along with the importance of following traditional practices and community rules. Three conclusions regarding policy can be drawn here. One is that the distribution of school bursaries must be properly implemented and incentives created for parents to encourage them to send their daughters to school. This would deal with at least some of the economic issues to the extent that these matters. But more than that, consistent attention needs to be paid to changing the gendered perceptions that prevent girls from remaining in school. This could be achieved through regular attention to community mobilisation around gender issues and by involving community leaders in this process. Women must be encouraged to have greater say in the public sphere. At the same time, schools need to be more transparent and deliver more qualitatively to meet the community's expectations. Such qualitative improvement in schools could be achieved by supporting teachers more effectively to work more professionally.

Almost all my female participants pointed out that despite their financial contribution to the family they had no voice in familial or even in their personal matters. The patriarchal society that they live in has a strongly gendered hierarchy and the concept of equality of gender is alien to Indian society. The decision-making power - at least in theory and mostly also in practice - always remains with the male head of the family; girls and women are supposed to carry out the tasks that they are instructed to do by male family members. Though many of the female participants had come a long way from the traditional docile image of women to shoulder the financial burden of the household and contributed to the family income, none of them enjoyed any power that was on a par with that of male family members. Patriarchy allowed girls and women to pitch in to share the economic responsibilities which were otherwise the responsibility of the male members, but

nevertheless it denied the equal positioning of women which might result from such sharing. While my research indicated that the girls aspired to going to school and cherished the dream of becoming a teacher or of taking up a paid job in the future, they were aware that they had no agency to make their voices heard. Those mothers who were willing to support their daughters to pursue an education with the hope of breaking the cycle of female subordination found themselves mostly ineffective in negotiating with the male heads of the family. This implies that even mothers, though adults, have no great power and share a similar position to their daughters in regard to decision-making in the family.

The validation of traditional patriarchal values and practices emerged as a key concern among parents. Upholding traditions such as girls' early marriage, paying off or receiving a dowry, and adhering to the insistence on girls' virginity before marriage were significant for the parents but did not support girls' education. Safeguarding female sexuality was considered key as girls are thought to be sexually vulnerable in their adolescent period. A girl's potential bad reputation implies a loss of family honour which means family members may be ridiculed by society. My literature review has drawn attention to all these factors (Thornton, 2006; Raynor, 2005). My research confirmed that parents take precautionary measures, that is, arrange girls' betrothal at a very early age, do not send them to public places such as schools or withdraw them from school as they 'grow big'.

The belief that societal norms are set by their ancestors was very strong among the men (fathers) I interviewed though a few mothers also thought this. Stephens (2000) and Jha and Jhingran (2005) have highlighted the role of social norms in prohibiting girls' education. Although some of the mothers thought that the time had come to amend these norms, they felt powerless to suggest this. In contrast, the men who potentially have the power to bring about change were not willing to do so. Their attitudes manifested the habitus Bourdieu refers to. It justified and perpetuated their dominance. The belief in ancestral norms went hand in hand with a certain sense of local community. Thus, following the crowd and doing what others do was important for the parents as an expression of their identification with the community they lived in. No one seemed to take the initiative to break through that cycle and welcome girls' education though they understood its value at a theoretical level. The professed tendency to act in line with other

community members to retain a communal identity was very strong amongst the parents, militating against girls' chances for education.

Custom and practice militated against attracting parents towards school, including through the incentives designed by the government. Incentives such as free textbooks, free uniforms, the mid-day meal, attendance scholarships, the provision of bicycles for girls joining class six etc. are in place with the expectation that they will promote girls' education. The findings of NIPCCD (2007), as discussed in my literature review, suggest that incentives such as mid-day meals improve girls' participation in school. In contrast to this, my participants, however, indicated their reservation towards these incentives. The latter were not robust enough to stimulate the parents to send the girls to school. The mismanagement of the distribution of incentives and misappropriation of allocated funds, highlighted by Jha and Jhingran (2005) and confirmed in my research, aggravated this situation. Consequently, traditional practices including corruption and the economic needs of the parents overshadowed the incentives and made them ineffective, as parents did not perceive a strong link between them and sending their daughters to school. Rather, and instead, some parents thought that more incentives should be provided to their sons. This reflects parents' strong preference for their sons' education rather than their daughters'. Both the teachers and the administrators I interviewed gave contradictory accounts in discussing the usefulness of incentives for girls' education. They considered them crucial to attracting children to school whilst being fully aware of the parents' indifferent attitude towards these.

There are several reasons why the teachers and the administrators held such contradictory views. For one thing, they themselves were quite authority-bound and felt the need to support their employer's, that is the government's, schemes and policies. Secondly, through their corrupt practices they profited from these schemes. Thirdly, executing the schemes was relatively easily done. The literature I reviewed, though it indicates the first two factors (Heyneman, 2004; Rampal, 2000), remains silent on the third issue. This calls for auditing and monitoring the proper distribution of incentives. Attention needs to be directed at improving the distribution system of incentives to reach the target group and on time. Mechanisms need to be put in place to promote the effective distribution of incentives.

Rather than focussing on the desirability of these incentives, I found that the parents were much keener on the regular opening and running of the school, its academic atmosphere and meaningful learning in school. This was also highlighted in my literature review (Kambhampati, and Rajan, 2005; Kane, 2004; Dreze and Kingdon, 2001). Parents, very reasonably, seemed to be expecting more from the school in terms of its delivery of duties than just being happy with its mere presence in their village and the availability of a few incentives. For them an ideal school opens every day on time and runs for the entire period, where the teacher/s come/s regularly and on time and children learn their lessons. The parents' frustration with the lack of all this was apparent. Most of the parents in my research pointed out that their village school neither opened on time nor was it regularly open. The teacher often came late and did not teach much. These findings corroborate Jha and Jhingran's (2005) study where parents complained about the absence of teachers in schools. In my study, some parents displayed their sympathy towards the teacher, acknowledging his – and it was always a man - obligation to fulfil tasks that are not school-related. Most of the parents though were antagonistic towards the teacher's behaviour but felt powerless to raise their voice against him. Their lower social, economic and knowledge status relative to him prevented them from intervening in school affairs. The above situation indicates the need of dual attention in policy terms – there is an immediate need for ensuring teachers' presence in school and their engagement in teaching students through the establishment of a proper support and monitoring system. Secondly, empowering parents and community members, by providing training and through awareness building, to exercise their statutory right to monitor students' and teachers' attendance in school, might transform the school into a place of learning.

A significant numbers of parents in my sample were illiterate. They knew little about the school affairs, and the teachers did nothing to enlighten them, for their own reasons. Leclercq (2003) and Ramachandran and Saihjee (2002) found similar situations in their studies. So the parents, as my findings suggest, either did not send their daughters to, or withdrew them from, school. Combined with the perception that school education is not particularly relevant to girls' future lives, this added to girls' non-participation. At the same time, the parents displayed a strongly gendered view of all this since their negative perception of the school did not stop them from continuing to maintain their sons there. They did this with the hope that educated sons might get a paid job or start a business to

secure a better future life. Their scepticism about job opportunities for their sons owing to the shrinking job market in the area did not stop them from dreaming about it. In contrast, the girls were not sent or withdrawn from the school with the argument that the possibility of getting a job was slender even for boys. It is thus obvious that the quality of a school and its functioning *per se* did not detract from the gendered expectations the parents had of their female and male children, and the same logic (i.e. if a school is mal-functioning I should not send my children there) was not applied to the consideration of boys' and girls' education. Instead, a gendered logic prevailed which suggested that boys should be educated at all costs and girls' education was an optional, and only theoretically desirable, extra. Given the highly gendered regimes of girls' lives, schools need to present an empowering identity for women through their female teachers. Although addressing the ubiquitous gender regimes of Indian society is very challenging, it could be dealt with by promoting adult female education. Local NGOs should be involved in interventions aimed at building awareness and supporting girls' and women's efforts to gain an education and participation in the public domain. Promoting involvement of more women functionaries in this endeavour would give momentum to the process of social transformation.

My literature review indicated that the absence of appropriate role models in the school discourages parents from pursuing an education for their daughters (Global Campaign for Education, 2005; Jahan, 1998). My research also confirmed this crucial finding. The non-existence of female teachers in my research sites in particular and the lack of female teachers in rural areas in general reduces girls' participation in school education. Though the state government decided to increase the number of female teachers by introducing a 30 percent quota of women teachers in 1995, this has not been implemented. The government needs to establish measures to monitor the progress of its plans and to ensure that female teachers are in place as intended.

As emphasized by scholars such as Dyer (1999), Jahan, Ramachandran, Belbase, *et al.* (1998) and Verspoor (1992), there are serious gaps between policy and practice here. This also emerged in my research as one of the reasons why the district and the state continue to struggle to keep girls in school. These gaps operated on many levels as my participants indicated. I shall give just a few examples here: the teachers were engaged in non-teaching

tasks despite the enactment of an Act in the state in 2002 debarring any involvement of teachers in non-academic activities. The parents complained about the teachers' absence from school and their coming late and ascribed it to their involvement in non-teaching tasks. Although the parents had no knowledge of the Act, the teachers and administrators who were aware of it, did nothing to implement it in practice. The administrators at the district level continued to deploy the teachers in non-teaching tasks violating the provisions of the Act and the teachers tended to obey the officers blindly as they found themselves at the bottom of the power pyramid. Non-enforcement of the provisions of the Madhya Pradesh People's Education Act 2002, which focuses on the decentralization of power, emerged in my study as one of the stumbling blocks. The inadequacy of measures to implement the Act's provisions was glaring here and highlighted the need to improve the implementation of the Act by introducing an effective monitoring system.

The involvement of the community in school management has been made mandatory by the state through the requirement that a parent-teacher association (PTA) must be established in every school. But in practice the PTAs are run on paper, that is, PTAs are 'formed' by the teacher but the parents, especially the mothers, remain unaware of them, their functioning, rights and responsibilities. Leclercq (2003) found similar circumstances in his study located in another district of Madhya Pradesh. Even those fathers who were presidents of PTAs previously, and who were the joint signatories of the school account, were oblivious to their rights and obligations. Again, a glaring example of a gap between rhetoric and practice. The teachers had no intention of involving the parents and community in school matters – they were intent on upholding their own supremacy in the community; at the same time, the administrators turned a blind eye to this. Although the creation of PTAs and thereby the initiation of decentralization is commendable, measures need to be put in place to ensure the effective functioning of the PTAs. This points to the need for parent education so that PTA members are empowered to take informed actions for the effective functioning of their local schools. Such training might best be delivered peripathetically rather than by the teacher.

Community mobilization, one key to bringing about change in the present educational scenario pertaining to girls, was recognised as important by the teachers, the administrators, and the state. This was also emphasised by scholars such as Rose and Subrahmanian (2005), Pandey (2004), and Ramachandran (2003b). But interestingly

enough, no one in my sample gave the impression of striving towards achieving an active and mobilized community. Though the philosophy behind the community's involvement to promote girls' education and the strategies to achieve this certainly had a place in the official documents they were confined to paper only. All the functionaries, from the teachers through to the education department, focussed on the distribution of incentives as this appeared effortless, and tried to avoid dealing with the more difficult issues such as community mobilization. Poor implementation and policy oversight showed a lack of political commitment as highlighted in the literature (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2005; Rampal, 2005; Ramachandran, 2004a; Jahan, Ramachandran, Belbase, *et al.*, 1998). There is a need for a paradigm shift here from merely undertaking routine work to attention to reflection, innovation and a pro-active attitude. An emphasis on community ownership needs to be revisited by the district in particular and the state in general. The dissemination of knowledge and training of PTA members regarding their roles, rights, powers and responsibilities is imperative to devolving the power to manage the school effectively. As my field data suggest, capacity-building among PTA members should be a concerted effort by the district and the state to maximise their role and involvement in the functioning of the school. Alongside this, an emphasis on the training of community members in articulating their views and voices would be useful to stimulate their proactive participation in the process. Shifting people from having no sense of self worth to articulating their views is imperative here.

Identifying the community's needs and delivering appropriately is thus crucial. The knowledge of 'the cultural and social attitudes and the aspiration of the people' is important to place people at the heart of development, as Haq (1995: 5) argues. A deeper understanding of this should lead teachers, administrators, bureaucrats and policy makers to concentrate on addressing issues such as changing villagers' attitudes and perceptions of girls' and women's social positioning and their traditional role. This also calls for the adoption of an integrated approach to ensure greater accountability of the school system where the teachers deliver their duties to assure learning by children, administrators really support teachers in administrating their responsibilities and policy makers place greater emphasis on policy implementation and on creating the conditions to achieve the desired outcomes. One obvious need here is the establishment of local administrative entities that

are separate from the teachers and educational functionaries. These entities should carry out the general administration currently undertaken by teachers.

Academic support for teachers to strengthen the teaching-learning atmosphere of the school has been emphasised by the state over and over again by incorporating provisions for teacher training in its annual work plans. The 2008-09 state annual work plan of the education department, for example, states that the 'training of teachers helps in making education experience qualitative and bringing about an attitudinal change among teachers' (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2008a: 95). The establishment of the post of CAC was to provide *in situ* academic support to the teachers. But in total contradiction to the state's provisions, the evidence from the present study indicates that the teacher training was not robust enough to address their requirements. The programme did not provide any practical solutions to the issues that teachers face in the classroom; it did not motivate them either in changing their attitudes. This suggests that research may be needed to investigate the extent to which current teacher training programmes are fit for purpose. My research also revealed that the CACs, basically intended to provide academic support, were not doing so. They were busy gathering data for their higher office and doing other related administrative jobs. Over-emphasis on gathering statistical data diverts teachers' and administrators' attention from issues pertaining to ensuring quality teaching. The use of CACs as governmental administrators needs to be re-thought. Measures have to be put in place to create separate roles for such administrators and for CACs. The latter need to be monitored in terms of the effectiveness with which they carry out their roles as CACs.

As correctly reflected in the literature, (Page, 2005a and 2005b; Jha and Jhingran, 2005; Dyer, 1999) due to lapses in implementation and a complete lack of proper monitoring the teachers tended to avoid coming to school, teaching in school and establishing a constant and meaningful relation with the community. They viewed themselves as subjugated by their higher authorities and 'the system' which led to their lack of allegiance to their profession. They felt that they were underpaid and over-exploited by the government deploying them in non-teaching and non-school related assignments. They had a sense of rebellion but felt powerless to raise their voice. They found themselves isolated in their struggle to meet the educational needs of the marginalised communities residing in remote rural areas – in so far as they tried. Additionally, they displayed a sense of inability or

unwillingness to challenge traditional gender roles. This also militated against girls' participation in education. Either they themselves endorsed these roles or they felt unable to go against them. The discontent they felt and their ineffectiveness led to their de-motivation, non-commitment, and non-attachment to their job and the community they served. Restoring teachers' motivation, conviction and a sense of ownership of the programme is thus key. Identifying teachers' precise training needs to enhance their abilities and capacity to meet the demands posed by the marginalised and illiterate community they serve is part of this. Teacher training programmes need to be designed to provide teachers with both knowledge and skills on how children, in general and girls in particular, from different cultural settings may be affected by the classroom and social environments, and interactions of a school. Teachers should be encouraged to reflect on their own cultures and that of the schools, and to be sensitive to how these may conflict with or complement their teaching practice. They should also be encouraged to be aware of, and attentive to students' including girls' cultural backgrounds to enable them to act according to their needs. This can be achieved through dialogical pedagogy as opposed to a lecture method adopted in the teacher training programmes. In my study, it was evident that enhancing teachers' capacity was key to their empowerment, and this might require teacher training curriculum development and review.

Ramachandran and Saihjee (2002) and Ramachandran (2001b) suggest, as was also evident in my research, that the administrators turned a blind eye to what went on in the schools. They sympathised with the teachers' weak positioning in the system, their over-burdened situation, and had a propensity to defend the teachers' behaviour. Some of the administrators realised the need for expertise and enthusiasm amongst teachers. They held the teachers responsible for the corrosion of the quality of the schools. But surprisingly, having recognised these needs, the administrators did not exhibit any proclivity for capacity-building among the teachers, maximising their motivation or gender sensitization among them in its true sense. Regular good schooling and the attempt to counterbalance the 'adverse impact of socio-cultural practices' on girls' education were neglected (Chanana, 2006: 220). Measures need to be put in place to support administrators to monitor and audit the effective implementation of governmental educational policies. This involves both gender-sensitive training and professional development for the

administrators themselves, as well as a clear focus on their work on education as their key concern, as opposed to requiring them to do non-education related administrative labour.

The teachers and the administrators I interviewed all expressed a need for the effective implementation of the planned provisions as reflected in the state's policy statements. The implementation of the programmes that translate policies into action emerged as very fragile at all levels. Haddad's (1995) observation that not considering the intricacies and complexity of implementation is the most frequent error committed by policy planners is apposite here. Ramachandran (1998: 144) aptly points out the flaws in Indian system of implementation and argues that though there are appropriate educational policies in place, it is their implementation which is neglected. Rather than formulating new policies there should be a focus on their effective implementation (also see Page, 2005a; Save the Children Fund, 2005; Lee, 1998). In my study too, it was quite clear that without a real paradigm shift from policy formulation to policy implementation little would change in the communities I visited. This means that on the one hand there may be a need for research into the barriers for policy implementation but on the other, measures need to be established that support policy implementation. Effective monitoring of that implementation in the form of process auditing needs to occur, with attendant incentives and penalties, to bring about real change.

 In summary, my research confirmed a number of key findings in relation to the problematic of girls' schooling that have appeared in related literature. Chief among these were: the prevalence of an imbalanced gender regime in the community that was informed by a subordinate female identity; illiterate and poorly informed parents; school and teachers not being able to challenge the gendered view and practices prevalent in community, nor able to encourage a more egalitarian attitude among them; a lack of female teachers in schools; the mismanagement of the delivery of incentives; schools neither functioning properly nor delivering qualitatively; poor implementation of planned interventions; a lack of commitment among educational functionaries; and a lack of political will to change this overall situation.

My research reveals that there are neither short-cut methods nor single solutions for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Attaining social change is a slow

and complex process and calls for an intersectoral approach. Such transformation requires cross-cutting reform which could be enhanced by the following measures:

1. The appointment of more female teachers in schools that may provide role models for an alternative female identity and make schools more girl friendly;
2. The introduction of training programmes for gender sensitization among teachers and educational administrators;
3. Measures to restore teachers' and administrators' accountability, commitment to the programme and inculcate professionalism among them;
4. Proper monitoring and audit of programme interventions such as the distribution of incentives, opening of schools on time, teachers' regular attendance in school, and regular and meaningful teaching in school;
5. Training programmes to provide practical solutions to the academic and administrative problems faced by teachers;
6. Proper attention to community mobilization and awareness building through involvement of community leaders, youth groups and local NGOs;
7. Intensifying measures to increase parents' literacy level in general and mothers' in particular;
8. Proper training of PTA members to increase their awareness of their rights and responsibilities and thus their involvement in school management.
9. Community-based activities to be initiated that challenge the gender status quo, using local media such as folklore, street drama and similar forms for awareness raising;
10. Proper and meaningful implementation of all planned measures in their actual sense;

Such reforms would foster social transformation by supporting girls' greater participation in education and would contribute to greater gender equality in society. A transformation from a vicious circle to a virtuous circle is possible if there is a more concerted focus on making interventions matter.

Appendix I
Biographical Sketches of the Village Level Participants
(Girls and Parents)

Girls

Madhu
Age – 13 years
Madhu belonged to a family of ST category. She had never been to school. She had two sisters and a brother. Her older sister was married and living with Madhu's family after being deserted by her husband. As she and her older sister had never been to school they were very keen to send their youngest sister to school. They both persuaded their mother to send their sister to school. She and her older sister were engaged in daily labour even before her father's death. After her father's death, according to Madhu, their work as daily labourers became more crucial for the family.

Radha
Age – 14 years
Radha had dropped out of school at class two. She had two sisters – one older and one younger, and two older brothers. Her older sister was married and was with her in-laws. She herself had also already been betrothed in marriage. Along with her younger sister, she was engaged in daily labour to support the family income. Though her older brothers after completing their studies were earning, they were not supporting the family economically, according to her. Her mother stopped working as a daily-wage labourer and her father became irregular in his work after both the sisters started earning.

Rekha
Age – 13 years
Rekha had dropped out of school at class three. She had to stop studying to take up household responsibilities after the marriage of her older sister. Her older sister was living with the natal family at the time of the interview as she was deserted by her husband and in-laws. Rekha though sounding progressive whilst promoting for girls' education was a reflection of a female guardian of patriarchy. She had the opinion that when girls are around in the house boys (brothers) should not do any of the household work.

Seema
Age – 12 years
Seema was the daughter of Mangu and Chanda. She was the second born in the family and had never been to school. Along with her sisters she was engaged in daily labour to add to the family earning. She also had the responsibility of taking care of her younger siblings after her return from work. She had a strong affinity towards studying which was

reflected in her learning a poem and a few numbers from her school-going sister. She had a fair knowledge of the benefits of girls' education. At the same time she was aware that unless parents are convinced about the importance of girls getting educated, nothing could change.

Sugandh
Age – 10 years
She was the youngest girl I interviewed. She had two younger sisters and an older brother. She had dropped out of school after class one to baby-sit her youngest sister who was three years old at the time of the interview. Her other younger sister aged seven then was in school. Her only brother was studying in a private school in class nine. Though the youngest in the sample Sugandh was very bold and articulate.

Sunita
Age – 13 years
Sunita was the only girl I interviewed who had passed class five. She dropped out from school after completing class five. She had one brother and a sister. Her older sister dropped out of school when she failed the class five examination and her brother studied up to class ten. Both sisters were already promised in marriage. Both were engaged in daily labour though the parents maintained that they could manage without the contribution of the girls to the family earnings.

Mothers

Bhuri
Age – 44 years
Bhuri was a widow with six children. She was from the Schedule Tribe and belonged to the BPL category. Out of her four daughters, who had never been to school, three, aged 21, 17 and 13 year, were married and with their in-laws. The third daughter aged 11 years was living with her at the time of the interview.

Chanda
Age – 25 years
Chanda was illiterate, belonged to the OBC category and her family was listed in the BPL category. She was the second wife of Mangu and had two children of her own. She was also the step-mother of three of Mangu's daughters by his first wife. Though none of her step-daughters had ever been to school she could persuade Mangu to allow her six-year old daughter to study. She, along with her step-daughters, worked as a daily-wage labourer to meet the family needs.

Devli

Age – 34 years

Devli (wife of Bapulal) was illiterate and the mother of four daughters and two sons. Though her older son was studying in class ten, her daughter, the oldest of her children had never been to school, was married and a mother of one child. Her fourth daughter, aged seven was in school as she was considered, by her parents, to be too small to take up any responsibilities in the house. She belonged to the SC and the BPL category.

Kamli

Age – 39 years

Kamli (wife of Choksingh) belonged to the OBC category, was illiterate, and was the mother of seven children. According to her husband, her poor health had been the reason for her only daughter to drop out of the school after class one. Though she did not think she was the reason for her daughter's dropping out, she was unable to express that properly when interviewed s she tried not to go against the words of her husband. Because of her ill health she was not seeking any labour though her family belonged to the BPL category.

Kanta

Age – 31 years

Mother of five children, Kanta (wife of Bansu) belonged to the OBC and the BPL category. Though both her sons studied in class eight and four respectively, two of her older daughters had never gone to school and the third one had dropped out of school after class three. According to her, the third daughter had to stop going to school to take care of the domestic work and her brothers in Kanta's absence as her older sisters had joined their in-laws.

Maina

Age – 29 years

Maina (wife of Mansingh) belonged to the OBC category and her family was enlisted in the BPL list. She was mother to three daughters and two sons. Her oldest daughter had never enrolled in school, the second one dropped out of school after class three and the third daughter aged seven attended school when I interviewed her. Both her sons were in school studying in class five and two respectively.

Mohni

Age – 29 years

Mohni (wife of Kamal) belonged to the OBC and the BPL category with her three daughters. She managed the tea stall that they owned in the absence of her husband. She also worked as a daily-wage labourer whenever her husband was at home to manage the stall. All her three daughters had dropped out of school, the older two were engaged in daily-wage labour whereas the youngest one was helping in the tea stall, running errands.

Moti

Age – 30 years

Moti (wife of Kalu) had three children. She belonged to the SC and the BPL category and was illiterate. Although both her sons attended school, her only daughter had to drop out to add to the family income and look after family members in her mother's absence.

Rami

Age – 26 years

She was the only literate mother in my cohort. She belonged to the OBC category and her family was listed in the APL category. Wife of Balu, she was the mother of three children and helped her husband to manage the tea stall that they owned. She worried about the dropping out of her two daughters from the village school after her husband had an argument with the teacher. Although she wanted to see her daughters in school, she felt powerless to negotiate the matter with her husband.

Ratni

Age – 32 years

Ratni was illiterate and belonged to the General category. She was engaged in daily-wage labour when her daughters were small to sustain her family due to her husband's illness. She was the second wife of Rangji who was a TB patient. When the older two daughters grew older she stopped going out to work and stayed at home to take care of her husband. It was her daughters who worked to earn the bread and butter for the family at the time of my interview.

Sabri

Age – 34 years

Mother of four children, Sabri (wife of Nanalal) belonged to the SC and the APL category. Her only son studied at a private school situated in an adjacent village. But her oldest daughter had to be called back from school to baby-sit the youngest daughter when Sabri went out working as a daily-wage labourer. Her second daughter, though, was in school when I interviewed Sabri, but was not very regular in her attendance.

Sugna

Age – 30 years

Sagna (wife of Bhima) belonged to the ST category and was illiterate. She had two daughters and two sons. She worked as a daily-wage labourer to support her family economically. Her family came under BPL category. Her older daughter had married and joined her in-laws after which she thought the younger daughter was required at home. Due to this, Sugna's second daughter left school at class four.

Fathers

Balu
Age – 31 years
Balu (husband of Rami) was literate, OBC and economically better off. He owned a tea stall in the village which was situated at the side of the main road connecting the village with the block head quarter. His business was doing well due to the location of his stall. As a result he was in the Above Poverty Line (APL) category. He had withdrawn two of his daughters from the school the year before my interview after he had had an argument with the teacher regarding the latter's behaviour. Though he had the plan, as he said, to enrol his daughters in school in the adjacent village, that had not happened even after one year of his daughters' being withdrawn from school.

Bansu
Age – 37 years
Bansu (husband of Kanta) belonged to the OBC category and his family came under the BPL category. He had five children, three daughters and two sons. The older two daughters had never enrolled in school and had married by the time I interviewed Bansu. The third daughter had dropped out from school after class three to take care of the domestic chores after her sisters left for their in-laws' house. Bansu worked as a daily-wage labourer engaged both in farm and non-farm based work.

Bapulal
Age – 40 years
Bapulal (husband of Devli) belonged to the Schedule Caste (SC) category and his family was Below the Poverty Line. He and his wife were both daily-wage labourers who had six children, four daughters and two sons. Two of his older daughters had never been to school. Aged 20 and 14 year, both were married at the time of my visit to them, the older one was the mother of a child and the second one was ready to join her in-laws' family soon. His third daughter who was then ten years old had to drop out at class three to help her older sister to baby-sit her child.

Bhima
Age - 37 years
Bhima (husband of Sugna) belonged to the Schedule Tribe (ST) category and was illiterate. His family came under the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category. Bhima had a small piece of land which was cultivated by him and his wife, Sugna, with the help of their older son. He had four children, two daughters and two sons. The oldest daughter had never been to school, whereas the second daughter had dropped out of school after class four to take up the responsibilities of the house after her older sister left home to join her in-laws. The older son had passed class 12th and the younger son was in class ten at the time of interviewing. Bhima, apart from cultivating his own land, also worked as a daily-wage labourer to meet the demands of his family.

Choksingh
Age – 47 years
Choksingh (husband of Kamli) was working as a truck driver and had seven children. His only daughter was a school dropout after class one, was married at the age of 12 and had given birth already to a child at the age of 14 when my interview took place. He was just literate, i. e., he knew how to sign his name and could read and write simple and basic things. He had attended literacy classes for adults for a few months but could not continue there as he often had to go out of the village for a long period of time with his truck. Three of his sons had passed class ten; the younger three were in school at the time of the interview. Choksingh had served the village school as PTA president and was very proud that all his children had been to school irrespective of the fact that his daughter had only been for one year. Although he belonged to the Other Backward Caste (OBC) category, he was confident and vocal due to his constant exposure to urban areas owing to the nature of his occupation.

Kalu
Age – 35 years
Kalu (husband of Moti) belonged to the SC category and his family came under the BPL category. He had one daughter and two sons. His only daughter had dropped out at class four to help the family in the household. She had also started working as a daily-wage labourer at age 11 and her betrothal for marriage had been arranged. Both his sons studied in school and their parents had great expectations from them in terms of financial support in the future.

Kamal
Age – 32 years
Belonging to the OBC and the BPL family category, Kamal (husband of Mohni) owned a very small tea stall in the village which did not do well, according to him. He and his wife worked as daily-wage labourers to maintain the family. Their daughters joined them to add to the family earnings. Out of the three daughters, the betrothal for marriage of the older two ones had already been arranged. All the three daughters had dropped out of school, the older two worked as daily-wage labourers whereas the youngest one helped in managing the tea stall.

Mangu
Age – 35 years
Belonging to the OBC and the BPL, Mangu (husband of Chanda) was illiterate and a daily-wage labourer. He had three daughters by his first wife, all of whom had never been to school. He had married for the second time after the death of his first wife who died after a long illness. Mangu had two children (one daughter and a son) from his second wife. He had allowed his six-year old youngest daughter to be enrolled in school after long persuasion from his second wife.

Mansingh

Age – 35 years

Father of three daughters and two sons, Mansingh (husband of Maina) was illiterate and from the OBC category. He and his wife were daily-wage labourers and his family belonged to the BPL category due to their poor economic status. His oldest daughter, aged 15 at the time of my interview, had never been to school, was married and had joined her in-laws. The second daughter, who was third according to the birth order, had dropped out at class three after her older sister went to her in-laws. Her dropping out was necessary, according to her parents, to shoulder the family responsibility which was taken care of by their older daughter previously. His third daughter who was seven years old was in school along with both of his sons, aged eight and 13.

Nanalal

Age – 39 years

Nanalal (husband of Sabri) had a small piece of land which he had been cultivating. Besides cultivating his own land he also worked as a daily-wage labourer in the lean season when there was no agricultural work. His family was on the APL list and belonged to the SC category. He had three daughters and one son. The oldest daughter had been withdrawn from school after the arrival of the third daughter to baby-sit the younger sibling. His second daughter and the son were studying; his daughter was enrolled in the government school located in the village, whereas his son was enrolled in a private school.

Partu

Age – 43 years

Partu was literate and had a small piece of land to eke out his living. Though he belonged to the BPL category his economic status was palpably better than that of the other respondents. Out of his three children, the only son was at a private school, whereas both his daughters had dropped out from school at class five. His somewhat better economic and literate status had not helped in pushing his daughters to study beyond primary level.

Rangji

Age – 50 years

General by caste, Rangji (husband of Ratni) was the oldest respondent of the cohort. He had two sons from his late first wife and three daughters from his second wife. Both his sons though earning were not supporting his family. His family was economically supported by the daughters who were engaged in daily-wage labour as Rangji had suffered from TB for several years. His wife was at home to take care of him, thus the entire economic burden of the family was on his daughters. The three daughters had never been enrolled in school as their parents thought they had to bear the family's economic responsibility.

Appendix - II

Table 1: Number of tribal and non-tribal blocks in Ratlam district.

Name of the Block	Status	
	Tribal	**Non Tribal**
Ratlam	X	✓
Jaora	X	✓
Piploda	X	✓
Alot	X	✓
Sailana	✓	X
Bajna	✓	X
	02	**04**

Source: District Statistical Hand Book of Ratlam district, 2007.

Table 2: Literacy rates by gender and block in Ratlam district.

Sl. No.	Block	Literacy Rate			Rural Female Literacy Rate
		Male	**Female**	**Total**	
1	Alot	83.00	54.90	69.30	53.40
2	Bajna	47.30	22.00	34.70	22.00
3	Jaora	82.30	56.00	69.50	52.40
4	Piploda	83.90	54.20	69.30	54.00
5	Ratlam	85.90	64.40	75.40	50.10
6	Sailana	66.40	37.70	52.20	32.70
	District Total	**74.80**	**48.20**	**61.73**	**44.10**

Source: Census of India 2001.

Appendix III

Interview and Focus Group Guides

Interview Guide for Parents

Father/Mother

I. Awareness about educational incentives/facilities:

1. Does the school in your village have the following?

Sl. no.	Facilities	Yes	No	Do not know
1.	Free textbooks			
2.	Free uniform for girls			
3.	Mid-day meal			
4.	Scholarship			
5.	Separate toilet for girls			
6.	Hostel for girls			
7.	Crèche			
8.	Bridge courses			
9.	Parent teacher association			

2. List the educational programmes/incentives from which you or any member of your family have benefited (investigator to probe in case of ignorance of beneficiary).
-
-
-

II. Factors affecting enrolment of girls:

1. Do you think fewer girls are enrolled in school compared to boys in your village?

     Yes/No. If yes, state the reasons:

2. Is your daughter ever been to school? Yes/no

3. If yes, in which class did she stop going to school?

4. Why did she stop going to school?

5. If no, why is she not going to school?

6. Why do you need her at home/ why do you want her to be at home?

7. What are the activities she is engaged with/ what are the responsibilities she is sharing at home at present?

8. What will happen if she goes to school?

9. Do you think girls should not be educated at all? Yes/no

10. If yes, why?

11. If no, up to which level/class and why?

12. Then what prevents you from sending your daughter to school?

13. What are the most important things in life for a girl?

14. What are the most important things in life for a boy?

15. What are the general perceptions prevailing in the community/society regarding girls' education?

16. Is there any change in the role of girls and women in the family when we compare between your daughter and her grandmother?

17. If yes what are they?

18. Do you think these changes are in favour of or against girls?

19. In your family who takes the decision regarding education of children?

20. What influences your/your spouse's decision?

21. What is your opinion about the school in your village regarding:

a)   Facilities offered

b)   Infrastructure

c)   Functioning of school

d)   Academic atmosphere

e)   Delivery of duties

22. What are the key social factors affecting girls not enrolling in schools?

23. What are the key economic factors affecting girls' education?

24. What are the cultural and customary factors affecting girls' education?

25. What factors prevented your daughter/s from enrolling in school?

26. What is the government doing to encourage girls' education?

27. What facilities do you wish to have for your daughter to be enrolled in school?

28. What changes would you want to suggest so that your daughter can be sent to school?

III. Aspirations and plans for daughters:

29. What are your aspirations for your daughter/s?

30. What would you want your daughter to be in future?

31. When are you planning to marry her off?

Interview Guide for Out-of-School Girls

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Never enrolled/dropped out
4. If dropout in which class?
5. Why did you stop going to school/why are you not going to school?
6. Did you ever want to go to school and study/do you still want to go to school?
7. Why do you want to go to school/not want to go to school?
8. Were you enjoying the school days? Yes/no
9. If yes, what did you like in school?
10. If no, why not? What you did not like in school?
11. What is your opinion about your school/your village school?
12. Do you think girls should study? Yes/no
13. If yes, up to what level and why?
14. If no, why not?
15. Given a choice would you like to study now?
16. If yes, up to what level?
17. If no, why not?
18. What do you do at home at present?
19. Do your parents want you to study?
20. If yes, why? If no, why not?
21. Do you agree with their opinion/decision regarding your study?
22. If yes, why?
23. If no, why not?
24. Why girls are not allowed to study/why girls are not sent to school?
25. Do you think the same applies to boys?
26. If no, why not?
27. What are the most important things in life for a girl?
28. What are the most important things in life for a boy?
29. What do you want/aspire to in life?
30. What are the general perceptions of your community regarding girls' education?
31. What are your suggestions to improve girls' participation in school?

Interview Guide for Teachers

Village: **Gram Panchayat:**

Hamlet/habitation: **Name of the School:**

School type: EGS/PS/MS   **Name of the teacher:**

Sex: Male/Female   **Qualification:**

1.   How long have you been working in this school?
2.   How many girls are there in the village/habitation in the age group of 5-14 year?
3.   How many of them are out of school at present?
4.   What is the reason for their non-participation?
5.   How many of them though enrolled are not attending school?
6.   Why are they not attending school?
7.   Have you ever tried to persuade parents of the out-of-school girls to send their daughter/s to school?
8.   In your opinion what is the parents' attitude/perception towards girls' education?
9.   Do you think girls and boys are treated differently by parents?
10. If yes, how and why?
11. What prevents parents from sending their girls to school?
12. How far have the incentives provided by school been successful in attracting girls?
13. How does the local community perceive the education of girls?
14. Do you think the social practices and culture of the local community regarding the role of girls and women in the family have changed in recent years?
15. If yes, what are they and up to what extent?
16. What is the impact of this change on the education of girls?
17. If no, why not?
18. In your opinion what are the main reasons for girls not coming to school? Please state the social, economical and cultural factors that affect girls' participation in education.
19. How far do gender stereotypes hamper girls' education?
20. Do you think the practice of early marriage contributes adversely to the education of girls?

21. Do you think the distance between school and home is a deciding factor whether to keep girls in or away from school?

22. Does lack of sanitation and water facilities in schools act as barriers for girls attending school?

23. How does the perceived quality of education provided in schools impact on girls' educational participation?

24. Do you think the school is doing its best to bring girls into the fold of education?

25. Why do you think so?

26. Do you get enough support from the parents and the local community in running the school smoothly?

27. What is your opinion regarding your relation with the local community?

28. Do you think government has done enough to encourage girls' education?

29. Which initiatives of the government to promote girls' education do you think are most effective and why?

30. Which of the initiatives do you think are not effective?

31. What are the reasons for that?

32. How useful are governmental measures such as free uniforms and mid-day meals in promoting girls' entry into and continuation in elementary education?

33. What else do you suggest could be done to increase girls' participation in education?
    a. at family level
    b. at community level
    c. at school level
    d. at policy level
    e. any other areas

Interview Guide for Administrators

Name of the respondent:

Post held: CAC/BAC/GC/DPC

Sex: Male/female

1. Since when have you been working in this post?
2. What are your major responsibilities?
3. What is your department/office doing to promote the education of girls?
4. Do you see any change in the scenario of girls' education in your area?
5. If yes, what?
6. If no, why not?
7. Do you think the initiatives taken by the government have resulted in increased participation of girls in education?
8. If yes, in what form and how much?
9. If no, why not?
10. What, according to you, are the main reasons/impediments for girls not coming to school?
11. What are the general perceptions in the community/society regarding girls' education?
12. Do you find any change in the culture and practices regarding the role of girls and women in the family in recent years?
13. If yes, what are they?
14. What are the key social factors affecting girls for not enrolling in schools?
15. What are the key economic factors affecting girls' education?
16. What are the cultural and customary factors affecting girls' education?
17. How do you rate the schools in your cluster/block/district regarding:
    a) Facilities offered
    b) Infrastructure
    c) Functioning of school
    d) Academic atmosphere
    e) Delivery of duties
18. Do you think schools are doing their best to increase girls' participation in education?
19. If no, what else do you suggest in this regard?
20. What efforts are made by you to increase girls' participation in school?
21. What are your successes in this regard?

22. What are the reasons for not being able to achieve full success?

23. How far do gender stereotypes hamper girls' education?

24. Do you think the practice of early marriage contributes adversely to the education of girls? How?

25. Do you think the distance between school and home is a deciding factor whether to keep girls in or away from school?

26. Do lack of sanitation and water facilities in schools act as barriers for girls attending school?

27. How does the perceived quality of education provided in schools impact on girls' educational participation?

28. How useful are governmental measures such as free uniforms and mid-day meals in promoting girls' entry into and continuation in elementary education?

29. Is the government doing enough to encourage girls' education?

30. Do you agree with the initiatives taken by the government for promoting girls' education?

31. What else do you suggest be done to increase participation of girls in education?
    - at family level
    - at community level
    - at school level
    - at policy level
    - any other areas

Interview Guide for Focus Groups

Village: **Gram Panchayat:**
Hamlet/habitation:

1. What is your opinion on education of girls?

2. Do you think girls should be educated?

3. If yes, up to what level and why?

4. If no, why not?

5. What will happen if girls are educated?

6. Why are some of the girls in your village not going to school?

7. What are the most important things in life for a girl?

8. What are the most important things in life for a boy?

9. What are the general perceptions in your community/society regarding girls' education?

10. Do you find any change in the culture and practices regarding the role of girls and women in the family in recent years?

11. If yes what are they?

12. Do you think these changes are in favour of or against girls?

13. What is your opinion about the school in your village regarding:
    - Facilities offered
    - Infrastructure
    - Functioning of school
    - Academic atmosphere
    - Delivery of duties

14. Specifically what are the common difficulties faced by the parents in sending their girls to school?

15. What are common difficulties faced by girls in relation to their education?

16. What are the key social factors affecting girls not enrolling in schools?

17. What are the key economic factors affecting girls' education?

18. What are the cultural and customary factors affecting girls' education?

19. What is the government doing to encourage girls' education?

20. Are you satisfied with the programmes, incentives and facilities provided by government to support girls' education?

21. What additional facilities do you wish to have for girls in your village to be enrolled in school?

22. What changes would you want to suggest so that girls of your village can be sent to school?

Appendix IV

Questionnaire for Participants' Demographic Profile (Parents)

I. Identification details

1. Village:

3. Hamlet/habitation:

2. Gram Panchayat:

4. Household:

II.   Family Composition

Name and position in the family	Sex male-1, female-2	Age (in years)	Marital status married-1, unmarried-2, widow-3, separated-4)	Educational status illiterate-1, literate-2, primary-3, middle-4, matriculate-5, graduate-6, higher-7	Occupation Agri*-labor-1, non-agri-labor -2, cultivator-3, artisan-4, service-5, trader-6, other (specify) -7

 *Agricultural

III. Educational status of children:

Sl. no.	Name	Age	Sex male-1, female-2	Current educational status 1. Enrolled 2. Never enrolled 3.Dropped out	Reason (in case of dropout or never enrolled)

IV. Social status of the household:

1. Caste (SC-1, ST-2, OBC-3, General-4):

V. Economic Status of household:

1. Listed under BPL: Yes/ No

2. Other Facilities:

    2.1 Does the house have electricity facility (Yes-1, No-2):

        If yes, since when (year):

    2.2 Sources of drinking water: private/public

    2.3 Distance of source for drinking water from home:

3. Monthly income of the household:

Sl. No.	Sources	Monthly income	
		In Rupees	**In GBP**
1.	Agriculture production		
2.	Dairy production		
3.	Other livestock production		
4.	Forest goods		
5.	Wage labour (agri.)		
6.	Wage labour (non-agri)		
7.	Artisan		
8.	Trade		
9.	Service		
10.	Any other		
	Total		

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