

Educational Schemes Serving Poor students: A Case Study of Schooling of Girls at Dhuri Village of West Bengal

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I. INTRODUCTION

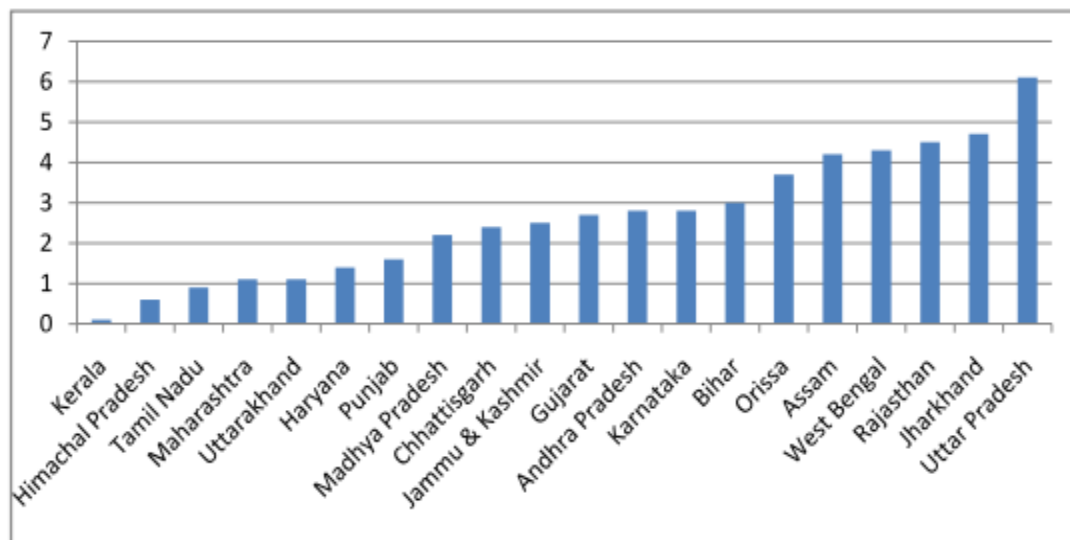
According to Census 2001, in West Bengal almost 50 lakh children in the age group 6-14 years were not attending any educational institution. They constituted 29 per cent of all in the same age group. Against the backdrop of this huge number of out of-school children, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was launched in 2001-02. The overall aim of this centrally sponsored programme was to provide quality elementary education for all children in the age group 6-14 years by 2010.

Until recently West Bengal's progress towards Universal Elementary Education has not been remarkable. According to Census 2011 about 23 per cent of the state's population has remained non-literate, which is only three percentage points less than the all-India average. Even though enrolment at the primary level has almost reached universalization, the schools failed to retain a large number of students in schools after they complete primary education. Even though dropouts at the primary stage have come down significantly, poor learning outcome is a serious problem.

It is well-known that the returns from women's education are comparatively high in general. Girls' education is instrumental in reducing fertility and infant and child mortality rates and improving the nutritional status of children and health care practices and in improving children's school enrolment and performances in their respective classes (Filmer 1999). Against this background, it is important to focus on the issues which are specifically connected with girls' school participation and performance, which differ from region to region, and between different groups of people. It is necessary to identify problems in an area-specific way, so that appropriate intervention programmes may be initiated. Girls' belonging to the disadvantaged social groups face two fold discrimination- first of all due to gender and secondly, due to their caste or community. One of the four goals of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was bridging this huge gap of gender disparity.

The combined effects of multiple programmes, strategies, prevention methods, by the state, private sectors and NGOs have had a prominent quantitative impact which is visible. Enrolment has increased through the better availability of schooling and greater participation of marginalised communities (ASER 2015, 2016). The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2011, prepared by Pratham, shows that the percentage of out-of-school children in the age-group 6-14 in rural West Bengal has come down from 10.71 in 2006 to 4.3 in 2011. Quantitative enhancement had happened but various studies reveal that regular attendance, retention and satisfactory completion of primary schooling are still visible problems. Data on region, caste, economic status, religion, gender revealed that disparities are still very prominent (Majumdar 2011). A common refrain in India is that statutory welfare rights suffer from weak implementation, monitoring and enforcement. West Bengal is no exception to this trend.

Figure 1.1 Percentage of out-of-school children in major states of India, 2011



Source: Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2011

Even though all these numbers cannot be directly compared with the Census 2001 figures, it can be concluded that between 2001 and 2011 significant reduction in the number of out-of-school children has been recorded. However, in relative terms, West Bengal still lags behind the majority of the states in terms of the percentage of out of-school children (Figure 1.1). Among the twenty major states, there are only three states in which the percentages of out-of-school children exceed West Bengal's.

Dhuri village of Sundarban region of West Bengal (Block Basanti, South 24 Pargana) has been selected as a case study. The village is the basic unit where policies are expected to merge into reality. It is in this unit where the impact of governance or the lack of it is visible. Socio-economic, political and cultural scenario of the area of present study needs to be mentioned briefly as the whole system has indirect impact on the educational status of the girl children. West Bengal has long history of pro poor politics. Yet, on poverty eradication, the state is a mediocre performer. The NSSO data 2004-05 show that about 12 per cent of the households in the state remained insecure when it comes to two square meals a day. Most of these households belong to the disadvantaged communities like SCs, STs and Muslims. According to the literacy data, the pattern of literacy achievements coincides with the exclusion of particular communities in general and especially the women in those communities. Literacy deprivation follows a geographical pattern which again goes in line with the geography of hunger where a section of people are adversely affected (NSSO-64th Round).

In this context, a brief discussion needs to be mentioned about Sundarban region. Sundarban, the land of boundless beauty with magnificent landscape is declared as world heritage by UNESCO. Canning is the major town for the people of Sundarbans of South 24 Pargans. Canning port of river Matla is the major entry point in the region of Sundarbans. Sub-Divisional office for the administration is situated in this town. This is the end point of railway connection with the metro city, Kolkata. This town was initially very active as a port. So, it is known to others as Port Canning. This town got its name after Lord Canning.

There is a long history of settlement of Sundarbans with a particular ecology and demography. The cultural history of the lagoon of Sundarban deltas are based on various issues. People, habitation pattern, beliefs on religious norms, folk deities and folklore, myths etc. are the major part of the cultural space (Bera 2010). To survive in the forest area, people came together under a common canopy of syncretism, which borrowed the myths from both the religious beliefs of Hinduism and Islam. With the unique climatic, geographical and socio economic condition- there flourished a distinct culture in the region. People are using and maintaining every part of the land, every plant and even grasses are utilized. People know the nature of every river, its timings of tides and waves; they know the nature of forest, the man-eater of Sundarbans etc. (Bera 2010). And all these have effects on the school participation of the children, especially on girls.

People of Sundarbans region are of multi-ethnic background with different occupational positions as well as having different religious faiths. They are living in a common ecological atmosphere which has created their own dialects. They are practicing and maintaining their linguistic identity. The people of this region are speaking Bengali language, but the dialect is little bit of different. The origin of the language is also Sanskrit (Jalais 2010).

Due to a huge migration from neighbouring country Bangladesh during post-independence era, a sudden influx of population has occurred in the Sundarban region. As a result of migration, vast lands were occupied by a huge number of people and de-forestation in the region started. A large number of populations, nearly 95 per cent, are basically dependent upon a rain-fed mono-cropping agricultural production and others on rivers as well as forests for their livelihood (Mukhopadhyay 2015). Honey collection and collecting woods such as *Sundari (Heritiera Fomes)*, *Hental (Phoenix Spp.)*, *Goran (Ceriops Spp.)*, *Geowa (Excoecaria Agallocha)*, *Baen (Avicennia Marina)*, *Dhundul (Xylocarpus Granatum)*, *Garjan (Rhizophora Spp.)*, *Golpata (Nipa Fruiticans)*, are the main source of income for a large section in the area. In the Sundarbans, more than 300 bird species are found which includes 100 migratory birds. There are huge numbers of orchids, ferns, micro fungi and lichens in the region (Mukherjee 2008). Fishing and collection of prawn seeds and crabs in the rivers and creeks is another lucrative source of money for the people living in the coastal part of the region. (Ray Chakraborty, Bhattacharya 2002). This prawn seeds is known as Tiger Prawn Seeds (TPS). This type of cultivation is easier than normal fishing activities in this saline water zone. Women particularly girl children are involved in this activity in the area (Dutta 2010). Another source of income is *zari* work (embroidery). Here again mainly the girl children who are engaged in this type of work, which is expanding in popularity in the villages as a source of income for the poor (Ray, Chakraborty, Bhattachaya 2002). These developments stand in the way of regular school participation of girl children.

According to the local myth, these people are living with an interesting eco-system. Their lives are between risks as literature phrased it “*dangay bagh, jole kumir*” (Tiger on the land and crocodile in the water). People of Sundarban region is denoted as “*bada boner manush*” (Chatterjee Sarkar 2010). A large number of men are entering into the jungle without any proper equipment needed for their safety in the dense forest. Villages near the forest is famous as the ‘village of widows’ where male members of the family have been attacked by the man-eater Royal Bengal tigers during their activities into the forest and never came back. These insecurities definitely affect the girls’ education.

The history of folk life of the villages in Sundarban region is significant in terms of caste, class and religion. This goddess Bonbibi originally emerged in the belief and faith of Muslim community but later merged with Hindu deities and worshipped by both the communities. The devotees are actually socially as well as economically backward. They are living in a place where various risks co-exist. To combat with these situations, they have the only option to choose to worship (Sur 2010).

This region has so many poisonous or semi poisonous snakes. The local belief is on Manasa, the Goddess of snakes. Death records registered in the region where many people have lost their lives due to snake bites. Snake bite is a very common in this region. And it is also observed that people have more belief on Goddess Manasa rather than doctors or hospitals. The community of ‘*Ojhas*’ are very active in this rural Sundarban region. According to the *Puranas (Padma Purana)* Manasa is the Goddess of snakes. *Manasa Mangal* or *Manasa Jatra* is also very popular folk-theatre in the villages of Sundarban region. According to various studies, in the month of Shravan of Bengali calendar ‘*Manasa puja*’ have been performed by villagers to satisfy the Goddess for her blessings. The ritual of the worship is to make floating boat (*Nouka*) by Banana stem which can easily float on the river. Basically women and children go to the river or any tidal water body for worship.

A common festival which is being celebrated by rural people of Bengal including the people of the present study is ‘*Nabanna*’. After the harvest of new crops, the villagers celebrate this with their relatives, neighbours and with others. They invite each-other for lunch or dinner together. All the preparation of dishes are being cooked by the women with the help of their daughters. The aim of the festival is sharing happiness with others. Sometimes, this ritual is followed by various village fairs like ‘*Nabanna Mela*’ etc. This is one of the ‘*parbans*’ as the proverb goes in Bengali ‘*Baro Mase Tero Parbon*’. This fair has its own characteristics. The researcher observed that various awareness programmes relating to trafficking etc. are being organized in this type of fair.

People of Sundarbans organize various village festivals in the name of the folk deities and other Gods of their belief. These festivals are not just a mere gathering of villagers but are also used as the place of increasing awareness among villagers on issues like women and girl child trafficking in the region, importance of girls’ education etc. by various Government organization (G.O) and Non- Government organizations (N.G.O). However, due to the rituals, various celebrations, children, especially remain absent from schools.

Political scenario of West Bengal should be mentioned here briefly. West Bengal has a long political history. A long 34 years Left history of ruling in West Bengal came to an end with the emergence of Trinamool Congress (TMC) party. In 2011, TMC won the assembly election with 184 seats and formed the government. Since 2011 to till date TMC is ruling in Bengal under the flagship of Trinamool Congress. In recent times, communal tension is evident in the area with the emergence of a political party with different ideology (Gupta 2010).

Rationale for the study

Dhuri village is an example of remarkable deprivation. Alternative opportunities of jobs (Zari work, catching small prawns from river) are more preferred as additional income. After 'Aila', fishing is encouraged in the saline water by private investors. Although school records show increased enrolment, discontinuation is high among girls above 12 years due, among other factors, to political disturbance in the area. Some parts of the district are facing communal turmoil (South Bengal Herald April 26, 2011). Parents are not ready to send their daughters to go to school due to the communal unrest in the area (interaction with parents). Girl child trafficking through Bangladesh border is another burning issue. As a result early marriage of girl children is a part of social life (Save the Children Annual Report 2010-11, Sanlaap Annual Report 2013-14).

II. METHODOLOGY

For collecting data, the researcher was given authorised letter from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai (one from the Dean of the 'School of Education' and other issued by the office of the 'Doctoral Advisory Committee'-DSO). Before going to the field, the researcher took permission from the office of the District Inspector of Schools (D.I.S) of Department of Education at Alipore, Kolkata to conduct the study in school. After taking permission from D.I.S, the researcher had to visit the office of the South Circle at Ballygunge, Kolkata and after that Sub-Inspector of Schools (S.I.S) at Kultali of Basanti block. The researcher also visited the office of Deputy Director (Grants-in-Aid), Bikash Bhavan, Salt Lake. The requisite permissions were given which helped her to visit various institutions without much difficulty.

The researcher also visited Block Development Office (BDO) of Basanti where the Digital Section and Department of Fishery provided some data. At Basanti, the researcher visited the Agricultural Department and Police Station to seek some permission as well as to access the secondary data.

On the basis of the authorization letter from TISS, Mumbai and D.I.S of Kolkata, the S.I.S of South Circle, Kultali of Basanti block requested the Head Master of Janapriya Nagar Janapriya Vidyalaya to provide an accommodation to the researcher at the KGBV adjacent to the same school. It is worthy to mention that the Head Master of the school not only arranged a sharing-basis room but also provided food which helped the researcher to stay there for one long year of her field work. The S.I.S of South Circle appointed one '*Shiksha-Bandhu*' (his job is to visit schools in the circle and collect data for S.I.S) who helped the researcher providing school related data.

With the aim to observe girls closely, the researcher took permission from the Department of Education of West Bengal and she was allotted a room in the KGBV centre of the school. Janpriya Nagar Janapriya Vidyalaya of Dhuri village is under the Department of Education of the Government of West Bengal. It is a co-educational institution with science and arts stream and have a separate KGBV hostel for girls. The headmaster and the assistant headmaster of the school attended to all the queries of the researcher and furnished her with necessary inputs. The researcher received much co-operation from them. There is 41 teaching and 4 non-teaching staff in this school. Students from Dhuri and nearby villages use to come to this school.

This school has six separate buildings and two staff rooms (female and male), one library, one laboratory where computers are installed. However, there is no separate teacher appointed for computer classes. One building is allotted for office where Head Master has a separate room. There is also a hostel for boys. It is heartening to note that as per West Bengal government instruction, a building is under construction allotting for Mid-Day-Meal purpose. There is running water facility along with tube-well water. There are two small rooms using for kitchen and another room to store fuel for cooking Mid-Day-Meal.

Apart from classrooms, there are six girls' toilets, six boys' toilets, two toilets for male teachers and two toilets for female teachers. It is worthy to note that there is one toilet for special children. In spite of the infrastructure facilities, it was observed by the researcher that the size of the classroom is not sufficient for the students. Students' strength is higher in this school. So, students are compelled to stand in the classrooms due to lack of sitting arrangements.

This school has three play grounds, two is their own grounds which are within the campus and one is for all which is situated outside the campus. This ground is bigger than other two grounds. Only school's annual sports held in this ground. This ground is being used for various festivals in the village such as Sundarban Gramin and Krishi Mela, fairs in times of *Eid* celebrations etc.

The objective of this paper is to understand the impact of educational schemes undertaken by both the central and state governments to improve the educational scenario analyzing the implementation of these schemes in this particular school as a case study.

The growth in enrolment in the very recent years has been impressive due to the mid-day meal (cooked) scheme of the government of India and Kanyasree Prakalpa of Government of West Bengal. It would not be irrelevant here to mention briefly the content of the two schemes.

Mid-Day-Meal (MDM)

Mid-Day-Meal (MDM) is officially named as the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NPNSPE). This scheme has been started in West Bengal since 2003.

This scheme was started with the following objectives:

- To improve the nutritional status of children in the classes I-VIII
- To encourage poor students who are on the marginal edge of the society, to attend school regularly and
- To promote school participation in general

In the school Janapriya Nagar Janapriya Vidyalaya, it was found that MDM has two types of impacts. Enrolment has increased due to the regularity of the MDM but the classroom attendance was found very irregular. It was observed by the researcher that after serving of Mid-Day-Meal, some students used to leave the school for their home. Headmaster and other teachers pointed out that these young children cannot stand for the entire day in the classroom. When they become tired they left and it was not possible for the teachers to keep constant watch on them. One section of the teachers has different opinions on leaving the students after Mid-Day-Meal. They said that *“these children are not so serious. They are coming for the Mid-Day-Meal, when they get it they leave. Their parents are least bothered for their education. They are only concerned about the food”*. Children were asked by the researcher about their experience in the classroom and the response was that *“Derite ele bosar jayga pai na. bondhura boste dai na hole pichhone dariye thaki..kono kono din tifer por barite chole jai”* (If we are late in class, we could not find place to sit. Sometimes friends give us to sit otherwise we have to stand at the back for the whole day, so, some of us used to go home after having Mid-Day-Meal). The researcher’s observation also supports the two views.

It was observed that though MDM is served regularly but nutritional value of the food, according to the researcher was not up to the mark. Generally the menu includes rice, dal with either pumpkin or papaya or soya chunks used to serve to the students. One day in a week students get egg meal. It was found that students’ attendance increased on the day when egg meals were served. It was also noticed that sometimes students used to take away the meal at home. The food they collect is being consumed by their other family members. It was found in the school that classrooms were over crowded before the distribution of MDM.

Kanyashree Prakalpa

A grave problem of girls’ education is early marriage. West Bengal District Level Health Survey (DLHS) 3 (2007-08) revealed that 54.7 per cent women are married before the age of 18 years, the legal age for marriage of a girl in India. West Bengal is identified as the 5th highest state in India for the child marriage (Chowdhury 2018). To reduce the rate of child marriage and female school dropout, Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme has been implemented in West Bengal with the initiative of the government of West Bengal.

Kanyashree Prakalpa provides two types of scholarships:

1. K1: Annual Scholarships of Rs. 750/- for the age between 13-18 years which has been increased in the budget of the government of West Bengal of 2018-19.
2. K2: One-time Grant of Rs. 25,000/- for the age between 18-19 years, if the girl is still unmarried

This scheme is a type of Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT). Every girl needs to have an account in mentioned bank and minor girls can open account jointly with their mother or female guardian. Educational institutions will co-ordinate with local bank to facilitate the opening and operating the account of the student and they have the major responsibility to monitor the whole process of Kanyashree scheme. It is compulsory that girls have to be enrolled themselves in any formal or technical/vocational educational institution. After receiving one-time grant girls can start their journey towards higher studies rather than getting married. For this purpose parental counseling module has been introduced by the authority. Constant awareness programmes are being organized by the administrative bodies of government and schools. 14th of February is declared as Kanyashree Day in West Bengal. This day is being celebrated through cultural programme which includes drawing/painting, recitation, singing, dance, and drama on importance of education. According to the report, more than 40 lakh girls are beneficiaries of Kanyashree Prakalpa (Kanyashree Prakalpa Annual Report 2015-2016).

The scheme attempts to combat early marriages of children in West Bengal. (Department of Women Development and Social Welfare, 2016). The aim of the scheme is to tackle the rate of dropouts from the schools and delay the age of marriage. Another aim is to ensure that girls remain in school, so that they can get knowledge to become economically independent (Kanyashree 2015). Kanyashree Prakalpa targets girls between 13 and 19 years who are in standard 8 to 11. The rate of dropouts is very high in this group (Chowdhury 2018).

Kanyashree Prakalpa is getting popular. The researcher has observed during her stay that guardians are aware about the money of the bank accounts of their respective ward. The annual report of Kanyashree Prakalpa of 2015-16 witnessed the fact that an increasing number of recipients are being encouraged to continue schooling and are targeting the one-time grant of Rs. 25,000/- (Department of Women Development and Social Welfare 2016). A rapid assessment was prepared by government of West Bengal in nine schools in three districts of the state (Purulia, Malda and North 24 Parganas) during April-June 2015; it was found that

enrolment of girl children between classes 8 to 12 has increased in 2014-15. It is significantly improved the presence of girls at the secondary and higher secondary levels of schooling which signifies that more students are graduating from secondary to the higher secondary levels (Chowdhury 2018).

However, this positive picture is not supported by the experience of the researcher. The researcher has observed that sometimes the grant has been misused by the family members of the children. The researcher also came across a student when one time grant of Rs. 25000/- (K2 of Kanyashree for the age between 18-19 years) has been used for dowry in marriage.

Apart from enrolment in school lives of Girls of Dhuri village have not changed much even after the implementation of these schemes. After interacting with 20 day scholars, the researcher found that usually the girls are staying with their families which include parents, grandparents, uncle-aunts, their siblings and cousins. Most of the times, they use to live together as a single unit which is known as 'joint-family'. A big family has variety of household responsibilities. These responsibilities come to the female of the households where girls are not the exception. They are compelled to perform all the shared household responsibilities. After doing all household chores, such as cleaning, cooking, collecting water from the nearest tube-well in the village, they come to the school. From early morning they start working and after finishing their work, they are free to go to school. The families are economically marginal and under such socio-economic condition, girls cannot focus on their studies. They have to lead their lives according to their family condition. Due to other various reasons, these girls are facing extreme level of vulnerability. Poverty in the region is high and it has its impact on girls' lives.

Most of the families of these girls are associated with agricultural activities - mainly seasonal cropping and a section of population is associated with non-agricultural activities. This region has also other type of occupations based on the vast forest area of Sundarbans, such as honey and wood collection from the forest, fish and crabs collection from the rivers and creeks in the Gangetic delta region of Sundarbans (Ghosh 2004). Male members of the families are mainly the sole earner. Due to their occupation, men use to stay away from home for a long period of time- it may be month after month. Apart from this, a sizable section is considered as migrated from the region. Mainly they have to migrate temporarily or seasonally to the other cities in search of jobs. In most of the families, women lead the household. With many children, women are compelled to live and run the household. In this context, girls of these families are the worst sufferers. The issue of their security is considered as grave problem. So, the ultimate solution is to arrange marriage for them as early as possible. In this village of Sundarbans, the age of marriage of girls in most cases is 13-16. During the field work in a case of early marriage the parents of the girl were advised by the researcher that their daughters are still in school and they should wait till the end examination. They have their own views. And their daughters' marriage is more important to them. If they will not arrange it in time then they will lose a perfect groom for their daughter. In this context, girls are not in a position to protest, not even able to go to others for seeking help. Parents are the ultimate decision maker of the families. While interacting with one female teacher in Dhuri village, it was found that in spite of being much educated than others she also has followed the same norms in the villages regarding marriage. Being a school teacher she knows the problems of early marriage but could not do anything when it came to her daughter's life. She opined that '*amader samaje meyeder besi din abibahito rakha jay na, tahole bhabishyate oke biye deoa mushkil hobe*' (our society does not allow any girl to remain unmarried after puberty. If I could not arrange the marriage earlier I would not be able to do that in future).

The researcher also observed that most of the village girls are still following the same lifestyle of her mother or grandmother gone through in their space and time zone. A girl must know the household chores and then she may go to the primary school. If she is doing well in the school then she will go for the secondary level. But, if by the proposal of marriage comes in the meantime then she must be ready for the marriage. Suparna, Payel, Madhabi, Shabana, Hasina, Reshma, Pinky all have to face the same fate. Schools are there in the villages, parents are admitting their children in the schools and teachers are travelling a long way to teach them. Children are coming regularly or may be irregularly, they are availing stipends, grants etc. as a part of their study-, everything is going on in a systematic way. But, still children are not learning textual knowledge (ASER 2016). A girl, before marriage, will perform her household responsibility, take care of siblings in her parental place and after marriage she has to perform the same duties in her in-laws house. It was found through observation, interaction and interviews that this cycle of lifestyle is continuing. What their mothers and grandmothers have experienced is not very different. They don't even have that urge to change the condition. The basic difference is that their grandmothers were illiterate, mothers were class-IV pass out and today's girls have education up to class-VIII or IX level.

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) published in January 2012 notes that in West Bengal 39 per cent students in class III-V would not read a simple text appropriate for class I. The ASER report shows that 65.4% enrolment was in 2015 whereas in 2014 it was 64.9%. The enrolment has been increased. Still students are not able to read and write sentences in their own language properly. They have difficulties to identify the alphabets in the text books which they have already covered in their previous class.

Communal tension

Since 2010, the entire region is going through communal tension. One of the respondents of this study is Surupa. **Surupa** completed her elementary level up to class VII. Due to some sudden development in her village she could not continue her study. Since 2010, communal and political tension has emerged in the village. Her family was strongly affected.

Initially the tension developed between the two communities relating to capturing of fishing land near the river side of Bidyadhari and setting up a Mosque. The entire area was disturbed as both the communities were using arms such as guns and bombs.

Surupa's father was an agriculturist and a daily wage labourer in the scheme of MGNREGA. Her mother served as a cook in the nearest lower primary school on contractual basis. As both the parents are busy for earning, Surupa, being the elder daughter of the family has to take the household responsibility including the care of her two siblings.

Apart from taking responsibility she was unable to attend the school regularly due to the tension in her area. To face the situation, the only solution to her parent was looking for a groom for her. And in class IX, she got married in a distant village at the age of 15. While interacting, the mother said "*Jodi amar meyetar kichu hoto tahole amader jibontai noshto hoye jeto...Ishwar amar meyer jonno amon chele pathiyechen*" ("if something had happened with my daughter our lives would have destroyed...God has sent this boy to save my daughter").

Trafficking

Trafficking is a very disturbing feature of the particular region which has its effect on school participation of girl children. Trafficking of women and young girls is rising day by day in West Bengal (The Telegraph, 2017). Women and child trafficking is one of the worst crimes of this particular region of South Bengal. These areas of Sundarbans are increasingly considered a trafficking 'hot spot'.

The researcher, while interacting, one such girl named Nafisa said that everybody seems to be unknown to her after coming back from Delhi. She stated that still she cannot believe that her own sister has done this with her. According to her, after rescue since 2014 to 2016, she was moving from one place to another due to the administrative reasons. Nafisa was lamenting that she could have sit for the Madhyamik examination by 2016 but could not. The problem faced by the poor family is the member's inability to communicate or lodge complaint to the police. Many of them are illiterate. So these young girls are considered as 'missing' (Basanti Police Station data). Nafisa was fortunate that her parents lodged a complaint in the police station. With the initiative of the headmaster of the Janapriya Nagar Janapriya Vidyalaya, this girl is continuing her study after coming back to her village.

West Bengal serves as a source of transit and destination for national and international trafficking of women and children. This is in spite of the fact that the state has evolved positive institutions to achieve gender justice during the last two years. Almost all districts of West Bengal are vulnerable for regular human trafficking (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The district of South 24 Parganas is other vulnerable area prone to trafficking. This region has international borders with Bangladesh.

Trafficking is closely related to the term poverty. Due to the high level of poverty in the area, one person tries to migrate initially. Poverty deters parents from seeking an assurance that their girl children will be safe in the city but after coming to the cities they are compelled to live in a vulnerable condition (Deb 2005). Another interest group can take advantage of this situation and involve with the racket of human trafficking, especially women and girl child trafficking with the purpose of forceful work such as labour work or selling of sex. Forced begging, organ harvesting and other type of work is associated with the bonded labour section (Huda, 2006). The economic condition of Nafisa, the case of this study also was very poor. Father of the victim was jobless, brother, a rickshaw puller. It was very difficult to maintain a family of large number.

Trafficking can be fixed through various techniques. Through marriage or the assurance to give fair jobs in cities-these can be the trap for trafficking of young women and girl children of low family income group. There have been incidents in South 24 Parganas, especially at Dhuri village where the girl has been married off to places like Delhi through mediators from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana etc. and these girls have been found to be missing till date. There are numbers of trafficking rackets in various parts of villages in India who are playing the role as supplier of young women and girl children for commercial sex trade and other exploitative slavery purpose (Sanlaap report 2006). Apart from these sections, family sometimes involve with this type of activities. Family rivalries in some cases have been found in rural Sundarban of West Bengal. Nafisa while interacting with the researcher told that she was brought to Delhi by her own married sister along with her brother-in-law with the promise of offering a job in Delhi. After her rescue, she was sent to a children's home in South 24 Parganas. Her parent sought the help of Headmaster of the school where the girl was enrolled. He took the initiative and contacted with the State Child and Women welfare department who brought back the girl to the school. It is very difficult for a girl to reintegrate into her own community in a dignified way once it is known that she was trafficked. It was found that Nafisa was not comfortable to stay with her family due to un-

acceptance by the relatives and other villagers. When the situations worsened her parents requested help from the Headmaster. It is heartening to note that the school authority has arranged an accommodation for her in the KGBV hostel so that she can continue her education.

One major problem faced by the poor income group families are that the members' inability to communicate with others outside their residence or area due to their illiteracy and lack of awareness. All these limitations not only make them socially and economically vulnerable but also explain why the re-trafficking cases are so rampant in this society. In this context, Nafisa was fortunate enough so that she came back in the village and is continuing her study.

The researcher came across another incident of an attempt of trafficking. It was Friday late night when a group of men who gathered for a special prayer in the Mosque at Dhuri, experienced a horrible situation. A girl of nearest village was forcefully taken away by two young local boys, but in vain. One of them was the 'boyfriend' of the girl who once promised her to marry. But, when the girl was brought from her home she had the instinct and somehow understood that their intension was not good and they were accompanied by someone else who was involved with the trafficking racket in the village. These two young boys took the girl and reached in the market place of Dhuri. The girl knew that some people would be in the Mosque for the late night prayer, so she screamed in front of the Mosque and the people rescued her but those boys managed to escape. Next day, this story was spread over the village. The researcher herself experienced the incident from the varanda of the KGBV hostel where she was staying. The above mentioned 'love trap' trafficking is common in this region of Sundarbans.

All these factors are interrelated. Low income level, low literacy rate of parents, relatively high birth rate – all these have a negative impact on girls' accessibility to educational opportunities. Parental attitude is that the girls' have attended school – that is enough, and that is necessary for 'marriage-market'. It seems that, to them, they (girls) have completed the 'desired' level of education and as they have attended the age of puberty, therefore, their security becomes the prime concern of the parents, resulting in getting them married off early. Their ultimate goal is not the education but the girl should get married as early as possible (Blanchet 2005).

MDM and Kanyashree Prakalpa have no doubt increased the enrolment rate, but unless the poverty level is reduced, employment opportunities are created, cultural outlook- that the marriage is the ultimate goal is changed- the quality education will remain a distant target.

Ray of Hope: Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBVs)

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBVs) scheme has been implemented with the aim of more participation of girls in educational process (Balagopalan 2010). In the policy level, the need of an alternative way has been realized and this scheme of residential school has been implemented in various states in India. This scheme was sanctioned to those areas which was already been identified as 'educationally backward' zone (Balagopalan 2010). The scheme has been implemented in India in 2004 for the first time and it has been spread out in 2007 onwards. The target of this scheme was to make a perfect future for women in India as well as combat with gender discrimination, early marriage, drop out etc. This scheme also has various limitations. Educationists have also criticized this scheme. They have emphasized on the living condition of girls in the KGBVs and their poor learning ambience. They have pointed out that KGBVs are not in a good position than other SC/ST hostels in India (Saxena 2012).

Following were criteria for setting up schools-

- Concentration of tribal population with low female literacy and a large number of girls out of schools
- Concentration of SC, ST, OBC and minority population with low female literacy and a large number of girls' out of schools
- Areas with low female literacy
- Areas with large number of small scattered habitations that do not qualify for a school

Criteria for enrolment of girls' are-

- Girls aged ten or more are considered for KGBV
- Girls who have no primary schooling facilities within 1 km radius
- Over aged girls from Residential Bridge courses
- Girls who have no upper primary education facility for further studies in their village
- Priority is given to SC/ST/OBC and other minority girls and those belonging to BPL families

Also reservation policies to be followed providing special provision for underprivileged groups:

- 75% seats are reserved for SC/ST/OBC and minority girls
- 25% seats are reserved for BPL families
- Priority given to girls with special needs

Under this scheme, following facilities are provided for girls':

- Boarding and lodging accommodation and food facilities will be provided to all KGBV girls'

- Study materials including school dress, school bag, text books, exercise books, pen/pencil, eraser, scale, compass box etc.) will be provided to all KGBV girls'
- Material provided for personal maintenance (two sets of night suits and three pairs of under garments- depending on the household they belong to)
- One pair of foot wear, one towel, one comb, one sweater per girl to be provided
- Stipend of Rs. 50/- per girl
- Library facility
- Other activities (Saxena 2012)

The researcher had the opportunity to interact with the students of KGBV of Janapriya Nagar Janapriya Vidyalaya. It was observed during the stay that total intake of the KGBV in Dhuri school is 100 whereas 50 is the limit according to the KGBV norm. Due to constant demand from the parents of girls in the block, the school administrative body has decided to take 100 girls. This KGBV hostel scheme was sanctioned during 2005-2006 along with the other three centres in the block and started functioning from 2006-2007 sessions. Within nine months they have completed the construction of the hostel and started admission procedure. The popularity of the hostel has increased. Parents are coming from remote villages of *Sundarban* region to get admission of their wards in the KGBV hostel at Dhuri. The researcher observed a sense of satisfaction among girls when expressing their views about the hostel. The hostel helped them a lot to carry out their studies in upper primary grades of schooling. These girls came from different geographical and economic locations where getting facilities of upper grades of schooling is rare. Girls from class VIII-IX while interacting with the researcher expressed that as a residential centre, KGBV hostel ensures security which they lacked while coming from their residence. For girls, early marriage is child labour in its worse form. Early marriage leads to early pregnancy which increases the chances of infant and maternal mortality. It is a continuous cycle of injustice in which a girl is trapped. KGBV hostel, to some extent now is in position to prevent early marriage by providing security and other facilities to the girls. Parents are also less worried about their girls in the KGBV residential school.

Through the constant observation while staying with these girls, the researcher found that there is an attempt on the part of KGBV authority to identify the talents, merits and other specialties of girl children and training to them are arranging accordingly. Apart from their own local cultural orientation, they are getting in contact with mainstream cultural exposer. Tailoring, gardening, cooking, painting, singing, dancing and computer courses-these are also a major part of their schedule of study at the hostel. They are coming forward and taking part in different competition at the various levels. Apart from studying in the school, they are now able to think of a bright future. These girls are at least to some extent, in a better position than day scholars of Janapriya Nagar Janapriya Vidyalaya.

According to the residential students, teachers of the school encourage them to pursue their studies. As these girls are mostly first generation learner, they need extra care. For this purpose, private tutors have been appointed. The researcher met eight of them during her stay. She interacted regularly with two wardens, four cooks, one sanitation worker (lady) and two night guards of the hostel.

The researcher found that the girls staying in the KGBV hostel and girls coming from their home are in different position in terms of their performances in classrooms. KGBV students are more regular than the day scholars. The researcher undertook several visits to the home of day students and found that the distance of school from the home is key issue of low attendance. As the girls of KGBV hostel are getting regular, nutritious food in time, they are healthier than the day scholars. Records of the school register indicate that the rate of absenteeism among the hosteller is low. Due to good health and regularity in classes, these girls do well in their studies and it reflected in their annual examinations result. The rate of dropout is also decreasing.

The researcher came across an incident. A private tutor, who came to teach students, once assaulted a girl. This incident had a tremendous effect on the hostellers. However, the tutor was immediately sacked by the hostel authority. The positive aspect of KGBV can be described through a particular incident which the researcher observed during her stay. Deworming drive is an initiative aimed at reducing intestinal worm infections that can stifle children's physical and intellectual growth. It has been proven that worm infestation prevents a child from coming to school. Health workers, child care workers and teachers in schools are expected to give child a single albendazole, the deworming drug either as a tablet or crushed into powder. The programme is in the lying with the World Health Organization's guide lines.

It was Wednesday morning; children came to school as usual to attend their classes. There was a notice issued in the class that there would be a medical check-up followed up by consumption of a tablet. It was declared in the class that they have to stand up in a row and would consume the tablet after medical check-up. As this programme held every year, through their previous experience the children were not willing to swallow the tablet. They used to throw the tablet away. The teachers of the school knew that fact and they were standing nearby. But, as per the programme, there was no health worker and child care worker were present.

As to the teachers were present there, the students reluctantly consume the tablet. After swallowing the tablet, within 10 minutes, children felt sick with the headache, nausea and some became senseless. Some started vomiting. Students and teachers were panicked. Some of the students were hospitalized by the teachers. The news spread out within few minutes and villagers started running coming to school to find out what was the condition of their children. There was a rumor that students were given poisonous tablet. Some people went to the hospital and some started damaging the property of the school. Some teachers have been brutally beaten up by the villagers. West Bengal was then heavily charged with the election battle. The news was spread by the media that almost 500 students were hospitalized in West Bengal.

Later, the doctors of the hospitals informed that most of the children were in empty stomach before having the tablet. As a result, they were tugged by severe acidity and due to that reason they felt sick and hospitalized. Due to lack of awareness, parents of the children gave them tamarind water so that they can vomit the medicine. It had its effects on them soon and the situation became worsen (The Telegraph 2017).

It was observed by the researcher that particular day, that, there was none of girl from KGBV hostel were senseless or either hospitalized or sick. They did consume the tablet. These girls were not in an empty stomach before having the tablet. It is the daily routine of the hostel that lunch would be served to them before going to classes. It was observed that every day, these girls are having plate full of rice and dal or rice and vegetable/fish curry. This was the difference between day scholars and students from KGBV hostel of the particular school. Those students were being hospitalized are coming from their homes. Most of the time they had 'Panta bhaat' (leftover rice of previous night soaked in water). This form of rice became alcoholic after one night. According to the doctors, some-times it reacted as toxin in the body. The whole programme was failed due to lack of proper execution. On the part of the parents' lack of awareness and proper care of their children's nutrition made situation beyond control. There was a lack of carelessness on the part of the teachers also. It was found that the guardian lost their respect and confidence towards the teachers.

Mid-Day-Meal, Kanyashree Prakalpa, KGBV schemes,-these have a great impact on increasing the number of students. Especially later two schemes are playing an important role on girls' elementary education. Those girls' who were unable to meet their expense for acquiring education at the early grades now interested to come to schools. Awareness in the society is noticeable. Problems of drop out, early marriage, girl child trafficking are reduced partially. Balanced food given to the children from the hostel also helps to improve their health which raises their energy level thus improving actual attendance than day scholar students. Quality education among KGBV girls is also observed. Especially, the Kanyashree Prakalpa is getting popular which aims to reduce drop out and restrict early marriage of girl child in West Bengal. **Conclusion**

During the entire field study, it was observed by the researcher that a sense of insecurity among the parents and children is creating difficulties to attend school regularly which has an impact on quality education. From her field experience, the researcher felt that a sense of security can be instilled through the set-up of more KGBV residential schemes. It can help to reduce many constraints which stand on the way of quality education. Therefore, proper implementation, monitoring, regular funding and intermingling of the schemes are need of the day.

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