

The Elusive Nature of Educational Incentives

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This paper examines the assumptions underlying educational incentive schemes with the help of data collected on the status and implementation of three such schemes for minority communities in Maharashtra. Though the lacunae in the design and implementation of these schemes are highlighted, the objective is not to condemn them. All parents interviewed gave utmost importance to a good learning environment. An incentive only offers temporary and partial relief. Good quality education for all children is the biggest incentive and educational incentives should not be assumed to be a substitute for poor learning environment in schools.

It is common knowledge that our education system is stratified and caters differently to different sections. From up-market schools with air-conditioned classrooms, state-of-the-art laboratories and even skin-sensor taps, to schools that lack basic drinking water facilities and functional toilets, leave alone adequate classrooms or even teachers. Not only are schools under- or over-equipped but people also have unequal resources (both cultural and physical) which determine the kind of schools they access. Two factors which are hugely over-rated by policymakers as being instrumental in children's enrolment and attendance in schools are the parents' economic status and their motivation/desire to send them to school. This perhaps explains the state's approach in conceptualising a variety of educational incentives (which essentially have financial implications) schemes for the "underprivileged".

This paper examines the faulty nature of some of the assumptions underlying these educational incentive (EI) schemes. It argues that despite some benefits, overall the incentives offset the abysmal learning conditions of schools which is often what the intended beneficiaries have access to and absolves the state of its responsibility towards providing good quality education for all. This it does by shifting the blame for not sending/irregularly sending children to schools on the parents. The justification assumed for such an abdication of responsibility is that despite being given attractive incentives, parents steeped in a culture of poverty do not recognise the value of education and therefore their children are not interested in studying. There is no denying that poverty obstructs parents' desire and ability to send children to school and these incentives may ease their financial load. However, there are several other variables, most important of which is the nature of the school one has access to and the kind of learning one experiences therein, that actually affect the meaning and value that parents and their children attach to schooling. This analysis is based on a research study which evaluated three EI schemes given by the Minority State Commission in Maharashtra to children of minority communities (Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs, Jains and Parsis) studying in private and government, both aided and unaided schools. The schemes in question entailed:

- Two sets of school uniforms to students of classes 1 to 4 each year.
- Attendance allowance (AA)¹ of Rs 2 daily for attendance to minority students of classes 5 to 7 provided the total attendance of the student is 75% in each quarter that the money is disbursed for, calculated on the basis of total number of teaching days in that quarter.

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• Infrastructure allowance which is given to those schools, where 70% of the student population belongs to the minority groups. A fixed amount of Rs 2 lakh is given to schools towards developing the infrastructure of their schools. This scheme covers costs towards minor repairs, provision of clean drinking water, building of physical assets like library, laboratory, computer room and toilets and purchase of equipment like computers.

1 Educational Incentives

Educational incentives are given to increase the participation of specific groups in schools by accommodating some of their school-related expenses (or disbursing the actual items). Incentives are typically sops linked to a “desirable action” on the part of an intended beneficiary. They are either given before the “act is performed” – the idea being therefore to motivate, or after the action has been taken to reward the actor. In other words, these are reinforcements which are assumed to have a positive relationship with the desired act/performance/behaviour on part of the potential beneficiary. EI² are given to schools, teachers, children or their parents. The latter are meant to encourage children to attend school regularly, complete their schooling or even perform well in studies. They could be either direct cash awards/stipends or in kind (cycle, textbooks), service (remedial classes, hostels), facilities (support for additional teachers, teaching learning materials to school). Besides the government and its various departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or educational trusts too have similar schemes. Typically, one could classify them either into demand-side reforms (lower costs to parents or increase in immediate benefits) or supply-side reforms (infrastructure, teachers, teaching learning materials).

1.1 Professed and Real Efficacy

Studies on the effectiveness of EI have shown mixed results. For instance, the mid-day meal scheme in India despite numerous problems in its execution, including maintaining the quality of food served, has found to be contributing significantly to the lives of poor people. With adequate resources and quality safeguards, mid-day meals can play a major role in improving the classroom and fostering social equity (Dreze and Goyal 2003). A review of literature on incentives shows that the economic dimension involved in these schemes is perhaps the most popular strategy to attract out-of-school poor children to schools. Elimination of school fees, for instance substantially increased enrolment, particularly of girls in many countries, especially Uganda in 1997 and Tanzania in 2002. Scholarships, stipends and cash transfers have also known to significantly affect enrolments in developing countries. In Bangladesh, the Food for Education Program which involved a monthly in-kind food transfer to poor households for their children attending school, increased enrolment by 35%. World Food Program (WFP) in countries like Jamaica, India (Tamil Nadu), Cameroon, Morocco, Niger and Pakistan has documented strong improvements in enrolment and attendance. The WFP also includes “take-home rations” in its

ambit. School health programmes, such as deworming and iron supplementation, are also known to increase school attendance. Specific interventions suggested to address the problems faced by girls, i.e., separate latrines, female teachers, reducing the distance from school, flexible school schedule, double sessions and evening school hours, introduced in Bangladesh, China, India, Morocco and Pakistan were found to be very effective. Expanding opportunities for post-primary education and making arrangements for educating mothers of school-going children also seem to have had a direct positive impact on children accessing educational facilities (Birdsall, Levine and Ibrahim 2005).

However, a few studies have also highlighted that these measures should be seen as support mechanisms and not as substitutes for institutional dysfunctionalities and inadequacies at that level. Studies show that financial (or other extrinsic) incentives will often compete with intrinsic incentives, they even affect the character and quality of performance (Schwartz 2009). Research also suggests that even if incentives improve the performance of teachers and students, they do so at a price, because they are less likely to be engaged in what they do and derive meaning from it (Seligman 2002; Deci and Ryan 2000). “The effort to solve the problem of underperforming schools by offering parents and children choice and by engineering incentives to improve the performance of students and teachers alike, if it succeeds at all, may do so at an unacceptably high price” (Schwartz 2009: 401). Research also shows that sometimes due to various incentive schemes operating simultaneously parents do not know what they are getting the money for. The regular procedures and formalities involved with each of them, further keep the teachers busy with administration throughout the year (Kapuria 2012). Studies also reiterate that well administered individual incentives work up to a point, but have little impact on the overall environment of children. There was a realisation that in the absence of livelihood security and a caring/supportive environment, the gains of individual sponsorship remain limited (Ramachandran, Mehrotra and Jandhyala 2007).

1.2 Underlying Assumptions

Despite the unique circumstances that each of this group is situated in, the underlying assumptions behind giving such incentives are:

- (i) Poverty is the most debilitating factor which prevents parents from sending their children to school.
- (ii) A partial addressing of parents’ financial problems, even one or two incentives, is adequate to make schools appealing for both parents and their children.
- (iii) Incentives act as a means to achieve a larger goal, it could be, greater enrolment, enhanced retention or better performance.
- (iv) Since incentives provide immediate gratification to parents/children as against the deferred gratification which school education may eventually provide on completion of schooling, incentives become the most important factor pulling a child to school and even substitute for a poor learning environment and basic infrastructural deficit.

All these assumptions reflect a complacent assumption on the part of the state that it is providing educational opportunities for all children, irrespective of their socio-economic locations.

2 Method of Study

The study covered all the six regions of Maharashtra, namely, Nashik, Amravati, Pune, Mumbai, Nagpur and Aurangabad. Twenty districts were selected across these regions. The selection criteria ensured that a range of districts with unique characteristics were identified: educational status (both backward and forward), minority concentration (dense and thin), budgetary allocations for incentives (maximum and minimum), geographical terrains (accessible – difficult) and social-cultural-economic status – (forward and backward based on sex ratio, age of marriage, caste barriers). The following districts were finally identified based on the above criteria.

Amravati (Akola, Amravati, Buldhana, Washim)

Aurangabad (Aurangabad, Hingoli, Latur, Nanded, Osmanabad, Parbhani)

Mumbai (Mumbai, Ratnagiri, Thane)

Nagpur (Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Nagpur)

Nashik (Ahmednagar, Nashik)

Pune (Pune, Solapur)

There was a mix of people with different religious affiliations residing in these districts. A total of 66 blocks were further identified across these districts. Around 12 schools were randomly chosen from each district. Therefore a total of 237 schools were covered under the study. Of the 237 schools covered, 72% were Urdu medium (38% private and 34% government managed), 26% Marathi medium (5% private and 21% government), 2% English medium and one private Hindi medium. A few schools run by Christian, Jain and Parsi trusts were also visited.

The principals in each of these 237 schools were interviewed and focus group discussions (FGD) and interviews were conducted with 2,409 parents of children from these schools. From each school, 10 students were also randomly selected for group interviews.

3 Lives of Communities

3.1 Homogenising Beneficiaries

Though these schemes were meant for all religious minorities in Maharashtra, it was largely Muslims (84.4%), followed by Buddhists (16%) who availed of them, by virtue of the schools that they were studying in. Despite the fact that these groups were heterogeneous in nature, these schemes clubbed them together and considered them to be equally economically challenged.

The over-representation of Muslim students in the study is also in keeping with the census data on minorities in Maharashtra. They constitute the second largest religious group (10.60%) after the Hindus who comprise around 80.37% of the total population of the state. Muslims are followed by Buddhists who account for around 6.03% and other religious minorities like Jains and Christians constitute 1.3% and 1.1%, respectively

(Shaban 2011). The Sachar Committee report (2006), which was the first comprehensive report on the socio-economic and educational status of Indian Muslims, pointed out the backwardness, institutional neglect and bias against them as compared to other socio-religious communities (SRCS) in education, employment and other related areas. The literacy rate among Muslims in 2001 (59.1%) was far below the national average (65.1%). Even the dropout rate among Muslims was found to be highest at the level of primary, middle and higher secondary compared to all other SRCS.

We did not come across any Jain or Parsi students in the low-cost private or government schools in the study. The Ranganath Misra report also pointed out that by religion, the highest income was that of the Parsis and the literacy rate in their community was 97.9%. The Jains also have a high literacy rate at 94.1% and it is one of the most literate communities in India. Even the housing conditions of Parsis were better and the percentage of households living in *kutchha* houses was maximum among the Muslims. Among minorities, about one-third Muslims lived in houses which lacked basic facilities like drinking water, toilets, etc (Misra 2007).

Since we did not find any children from other SRCS, besides Muslims, we visited a few other schools run by trusts of other religious communities. The convent schools visited were unaware of these schemes. One of the principals of an aided convent school stated outright that she did not want any interference from government in the functioning of their school and hence did not want any allowance for infrastructure from them either. Similarly both the Parsi managed schools were not only ignorant about these schemes but were sceptical about their value. One of the principals said, “Parsis have historically contributed to the city; set up various foundations and schools. Why would we not take care of the needs of our community?” Parsi children, we were informed, were either studying in the Indian Certificate for Secondary Education (ICSE), Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) or high-end Parsi schools. Another school run by a Jain trust for the Kutchi community was a private unaided one and, in stark contrast to other schools studied, had excellent infrastructural facilities. We were categorically told by one of the trustees that, “Jains are very well off and there is no reason for them to be found either in low-end private or municipality schools.” However, so far as the conceptualisation of these schemes was concerned, the needs of all religious minorities were considered similar, irrespective of the actual differences among them.

3.2 Sharing Parental Responsibilities

Children availing of these benefits all belonged to poor families. A majority of the parents were daily wage labourers without any regular source of income. In urban areas, most of them worked in the informal sector and were involved in hawking and petty trades. A few of them even had petty businesses like small mobile and cycle repair shops. While in urban areas most of the women worked as domestic help in nearby houses, in rural areas they worked either in agricultural farms or on construction sites.

Their children assisted them in both household chores and work outside the home. Districts such as Ahmednagar, Parbhani, Malegaon in Nashik and Bhiwandi in Thane have a large number of boys dropping out in the upper primary classes to supplement the family income by working in brick kilns, hotels, looms and even construction sites. Girls in Marathwada and Vidarbha regions spend a substantial amount of their time filling water. Queuing up for water seemed to be a predominant activity in almost all the childrens' lives. In Washim, a predominantly agricultural economy and a minority concentrated district, children worked in the fields with their parents, especially on weekends. In Parbhani the rate of child labour was very high with children employed in hotels, dhabas and brick kilns. They also worked in garages and did other odd jobs to supplement their family income.

4 Implementation of Incentive Schemes

4.1 Attendance Allowance

The main objective of this scheme was to, "encourage the children of minority communities to attend schools regularly and punctually and to develop in them a liking for education" (Minority Development Department 2012). Data collected from 187 schools eligible for this scheme revealed that while 22% of schools received full AA, 49% received a partial amount and 29% did not receive any allowance at all. Besides the irregularities in its disbursement, there were a few other anomalies found in the implementation of this scheme.

4.1.1 Unequal Attendance: Uniform Allowance

Inadequate funds received by most schools meant that children did receive the uniform allowance but less money than what they were individually entitled to. Though there were slight variations across districts, in most places this allowance was insufficient and varied anywhere between Rs 92 and Rs 220 (as against a maximum of Rs 440 which a child could possibly get) in one academic year.

Under these circumstances, school principals found an ingenious way of dealing with this shortage – they distributed the money equally among all eligible students, irrespective of the number of days on which they attended school. This was because most of these places did not have complete data on the number of minority school students studying in their districts.³ The grant for AA was often lower than the actual requirement and was distributed in proportion to the minority population of the districts rather than the actual attendance of students.

Even when the schools received AA, there was a delay. Some schools received the grant as late as one year after the due date, posing certain practical difficulties in its disbursement. Since a majority of government schools were not high schools, they found it extremely challenging to disburse the grant among students who had passed Class 7 and left the school. In places like Mumbra, for instance, where most of the residents lived on rent, locating parents became a challenge. The same was true for communities which frequently migrated to other places.

4.1.2 Frugal Allowance: Attractive Wages

The allowance of Rs 2 a day was too small to significantly impact the lives of these children and their families who were extremely poor. This allowance was apparently meant to motivate poor parents. However, the opportunities available to such children even in the unorganised sector were far greater in terms of money that could be earned by them on an everyday basis – be it on construction sites, dhabas or local factories, etc. In Osmanabad and Parbhani, a farm labourer earned Rs 300 daily with children being paid a minimum of Rs 150 a day. As a result, schools had high absenteeism during harvest season with children dropping out of school and accompanying their parents to the field.

Besides the frugal amount being given as AA, parents spent far greater money on sending their children to school. There were several expenses incurred by parents on notebooks, stationary, socks, shoes and most of all, travel. A large number of parents in urban slums sent their children for tuitions. Further, the parents also stated that they often lost a day's wage in coming to school to collect this allowance which was far lesser than what they would earn on a given day because of which many of them chose not to come.

So even if the AA was conceived keeping in mind the poor economic status of such families, the amount thought of was totally unrealistic to fulfil any genuine needs of these families. Moreover, there were plenty of short-term opportunities available to such children to immediately address their needs.

4.2 Free Uniforms

The uniform scheme was started in 2009-10. Its underlying objective was to, "help reduce dropout rates, improve student attendance and help motivate them to continue their education" (Minority Development Department 2012).

Data collected from 187 schools eligible under this scheme revealed that while 27% schools received grants for uniforms, 45% received an incomplete grant and the remaining 28% received no uniforms or grants at all. In some places, schools got uniforms while in other places, money was given for the same. Thane and Amravati reported the highest number of schools receiving the uniform grant. Mumbai reported mixed results with half the schools receiving the uniforms while the other half did not. Schools in Ahmednagar, Gadchiroli, Akola, Aurangabad, Latur and Washim did not receive any uniforms. In fact, in Gadchiroli, one of the block education officers was unaware of the existence of this scheme. The study brought out three major concerns as far as the implementation of this scheme was concerned.

4.2.1 Ill-fitting Uniforms

Delay in receiving school uniforms/grants for them was a universal problem found across all schools. Some schools received uniforms nearly two years after the child's measurement had been sent by which time the child had grown bigger and taller. Delay also meant that children managed by wearing old, tattered and ill-fitting uniforms or their parents spent money on buying them in the hope that they would get reimbursed. In Mumbra, parents were asked to purchase uniforms themselves

and when the school principals of that area asked the Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) to reimburse the parents for the expenditure incurred, the TMC refused to do so.

The delay in providing uniforms can be understood better if it is linked to the centralisation process for procuring them.⁴ The centralisation process for uniforms required schools to provide the design of the uniform as well as measurement of the students before the beginning of the academic year to the education officer (EO). The EO in turn gave this information to the Handloom Corporation. The Handloom Corporation provided a sample, which had to be approved by the EO after which the order was placed. Since each private school had its own distinct uniform, with thousands of private schools in each district, the centralisation process became cumbersome unlike the government schools, which had the same uniform for all its schools across the district. This procedure worked particularly against the private schools.

4.2.2 Insufficient Money

The scheme has a provision for salwar kameez for girls as well as full pants and shirts for boys. However, school principals complained that the department provided cloth for only half pants for boys and skirts for girls. The school principals in Ahmednagar and Mumbra complained that they had sent back the uniforms since they did not comply with the community requirements of salwar kameez for girls and full pants for boys. In our discussion with the director, Minority and Adult Education Department, we were told that in 2011-12, it had requested an amount of Rs 30 crore to implement the uniform scheme but received only Rs 13 crore. In such a situation, it provided uniforms only to boys since girls were already covered under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).

There were some schools which were given cheques for getting uniforms stitched by the department but the amount was insufficient to even buy the requisite cloth, leave alone cover stitching charges. The schools which received a lump sum amount to stitch uniforms were given Rs 200 per uniform set per child which included a stitching charge of Rs 58 apart from the purchase of cloth. The principals and managements complained that the stitching rate was half the existing market rate. Stitching of pants was also more expensive than stitching of the salwar kameez. Tailors who would agree to stitch at government rates were impossible to find. Most of the schools looked for *mahila mandals* (women's groups) in the area to do this task, such groups were the only ones with whom they could negotiate the rates.

It was also found that in some places uniforms were provided just before important occasions. For instance, parents and children in Ahmednagar district complained that rather than the beginning of the academic year, they received uniforms a few days prior to the Independence Day function so that the children could wear new clothes for the parade.

4.3 Infrastructure Allowance

With a view to improving the quality of education, prominent government recognised aided/unaided schools having at least 70% minority students are to be provided financial assistance

to the tune of Rs 2 lakh maximum for infrastructure development and provision of basic facilities in their schools (Minority Development Department 2012).

The data on the infrastructure scheme was very positive. More than 80% of the schools which had applied for infrastructure grant had received it. A few schools did not get this grant because the applications submitted by them were either incomplete or they had reapplied for items received in the previous year. A few schools did not reapply for this grant as they felt that excessive paperwork and constant interference from officials demanding various proofs made it very cumbersome. The caveat of not reapplying for grant for an item previously received put school principals in a peculiar situation. For instance, if a particular school applied once for tables and chairs for students, they could not reapply for the same grant next year, even if requirements for other classes had not been met. In a number of schools children of lower classes sat on the floor with mats brought from home. Benches (dual desks) were available only for students of higher classes. Some repairs also required more than the sanctioned amount and had to be thus carried out in many phases, which was simply not possible under this scheme. Therefore, some schools continued to function from buildings which were unsafe due to excessive water seepage and other problems and would require more than Rs 2 lakh.

The conceptualisation and execution of this scheme reflected poor planning on part of either the schools or the department. Schools often applied for grants in a piecemeal and ad hoc manner with no vision for the overall development of the school. This led to peculiar situations where they received computers but did not use them for lack of space to keep them and were hence locked up in the principal's office. In other cases, they were not connected to any electrical points or if they were installed, there were no chairs for students to sit and work on them. Moreover, load-shedding was a severe problem in most places and the schools were in no position to buy generators.

The infrastructure scheme is essentially meant for private schools as government managed schools received an annual maintenance grant of Rs 12,000. Although the private schools grappled with their infrastructure needs, quite a few government schools with a majority of minority community students were also found lacking in basic infrastructure provisions.

5 Overall Context of State Schooling

The schools were abysmally equipped. Quite a few had leaking roofs, poor ventilation, improper lighting, no fans and no drinking water taps. Since most schools did not have boundary walls, the security of children, especially of girls was a major concern. Schools in some urban areas, like Mumbra were in congested, dirty and unhygienic areas, with several partially constructed buildings around them. Quite a few schools did not even have adequate classrooms. There were classes being held in open corridors, or in rooms which were stacked with furniture. Often the rooms were only partially constructed with incomplete flooring and chipped plaster. Libraries were

rare and presence of teaching learning materials in classrooms was restricted to a few old and tattered charts on the walls. Schools in most districts, except Mumbai, had to face load-shedding for three to six hours a day. In cramped ill-ventilated rooms, with dirty surroundings, it was a huge challenge for these children to concentrate on their studies.

Toilets are a nightmare in most schools and even if there were toilets (hardly ever separate) they were dirty as there was no provision of running or stored water in them. Children either controlled themselves or whenever possible went home and did not come back. Some schools which had toilets in good condition were locked and opened only for teachers to use or were meant for “special” guests. There was no designated staff for their upkeep. In some of the government schools, children were even made to clean the toilets as well as sweep the classrooms and the common passage.

Most schools – both Urdu and Marathi medium – even had a shortage of teachers. With staff shortage and several non-teaching duties assigned to those few teachers, actual classroom teaching got substantially neglected.

6 Low-cost Private Schools

6.1 Is Private Better?

Over the past 10 years, the neo-liberal economic regime has been favouring a discourse which proposes the viability of low-cost private schools for the poor as being both cost-efficient and better than government schools. There have been a spate of comparative studies which compare the performance of government schoolchildren with low-cost private school students, showing the superiority of the latter (Tooley and Dixon 2005). While the neo-liberal lobby highlights the achievements of these students, those opposing them find several flaws in such studies – lack of conceptual clarity, faulty methodology and biased interpretation and presentation of results (Nawani 2012).

6.2 Insufficient High Schools

Looking at the data emerging from our study, it was clear that one important reason for parents putting their children into private schools was an insufficient number of government schools in those areas. The District Information on School Education (2012) (DISE provisional data 2011-12) data shows a shortage of government high schools in Maharashtra. It shows that while there are a huge number of government schools at the primary level, this number reduces significantly at the upper primary, secondary and higher secondary levels. Juneja (2007) presents a similar explanation for the declining enrolment and dropout rate of children from municipal schools. She explains that the phenomenon of negative growth of enrolment at the primary stage is seen only in those cities where the next level of education is provided only through private aided schools (Juneja 2007). The Sachar Committee report also shows a significant inverse correlation between the proportion of Muslim population and the availability of educational infrastructure in small villages.

6.3 Make Money, Exploit Teachers

This shortage is looked at as a potential business opportunity by the private sector, venturing into education for profit. Nambissan (2012) reiterates that there are powerful financial interests involved in the private/low cost/affordable school sector. The private school managements take pride in setting up schools in areas which have no schools and which are largely inhabited by poor people. This also includes many slums in urban areas which are often neglected by the government. In Aurangabad, one of the representatives of a private school management mentioned running 24 schools under the same management. In Parbhani city, each of the 12 “community leaders” who were interviewed headed at least one private school with one having as many as 11 schools under him.

Besides this, since the private schools are not eligible for grants from the government they try and lure poor parents by providing them with similar incentives. This they do by forcing teachers to contribute part of their salaries towards such incentives. The principals of some private schools said that they had appointed peons and their salaries were being paid from contributions made either by teachers or the management. Not that the community members were spared. They, including teachers, were made to contribute towards school-related expenses, which were quite often linked to the religious duty of *zakat*. Some of these Urdu medium schools imposed a religious way of life among the children. Uniforms for children as young as six and seven years comprised of head scarves for girls and skullcaps for boys.

7 Examining the Incentive Schemes

This section tries to examine the objectives and assumptions underlying these schemes and point out limitations inherent in them.

The first assumption that these schemes are based on is that poverty affects the parents’ ability to send children to school. Undoubtedly poverty is one of the most debilitating factors obstructing parents’ desire to send their children to school. However, we did come across several poor parents who sent their children to school, despite severe financial constraints and even arranged tuitions for them. Some also said that they would put all their resources together and ensure that their children go to school only if they were satisfied with their progress in schools.

The second assumption that providing even a few small incentives will make the school appealing to parents was also found to be problematic. These incentives only partially, if not superficially, fulfilled the needs of parents and their wards. For example, the uniform scheme does not really work as an incentive because there is no value addition that this scheme is making in the lives of poor people. The uniform is a basic requirement for school-going children and if the government provides for it, then it essentially works towards removing an irritant albeit essential. Besides the poor implementation of this scheme, other problems like delay, inadequate grant and poor quality of cloth further compounded agony of parents.

Whether the requirement was that of the student in the form of uniform or the school in the form of infrastructure, the partial addressing of such needs served little purpose. For example, even though the infrastructure allowance made a reasonable difference to the school's assets and learning environment, this piecemeal approach towards procuring equipment or strengthening the school's infrastructure was not sufficient in making it adequate in terms of its resources. Most schools despite receiving this grant appeared to be in a state of shambles. There was no comprehensive vision or planning which got reflected in the way schools applied for this grant. Items under infrastructure were bought (and even granted) in a piecemeal manner and that is why despite money being received (and given), the schools did not appear to be adequately equipped.

Similarly, where the incentive was small, for example, the AA, as compared to the economic opportunities available to children outside school, the incentive failed to offer any attraction to the parents. Moreover, individual incentives despite their value cannot possibly cover all the costs borne by parents towards their children's schooling. If incentives were all that their parents were interested in, then they themselves would not have incurred any costs on their children's schooling, especially the tuition charges. Children enrolled for tuitions reflected parental desire for their children to learn, which was obviously not being fulfilled in the schools that they were accessing.

The children interviewed in the study also showed a lack of pride in their schools. They said that the schools neither provided them with decent classrooms to sit in, leave alone proper chairs, nor toilets to relieve themselves, nor proper books or teachers to guide and teach them. Everyone made fun of them, including their teachers and parents. Their despair could be expressed thus in a nutshell, "the teachers feel that children from our background could never learn and our parents complain that since schools did not teach, there was no point in wasting time going to school every day." Despite the challenges they faced, the children could still be seen in school desirous of learning in an atmosphere which offered little to them. All children interviewed in the study aspired to have careers which required them to complete higher education. Their aspirations included wanting to become doctors, engineers, pilots, police officers, etc. This was in stark contrast to the lives of their parents who worked in the informal sector, earned daily wages and lived a life of bare subsistence.

The third assumption that incentives would serve as a means towards achieving larger educational objectives was also fraught with problems. The idea behind introducing these schemes apparently is, "to develop a liking for education among children, reduce dropout rates, improve student attendance and help motivate them to continue their education and improve the overall quality of education". These schemes unfortunately have very little, almost a non-existent relationship with any of these professed aims. They are meant to make schools more appealing to parents by providing some economic relief to them but they by no stretch of imagination

ensure that children experience a good quality education. Out of the three schemes, the infrastructure scheme still tries to equip schools with certain basic facilities. However, the study shows that their presence alone is not enough to either ensure a pedagogically rich environment or ensure that the books, computers, etc, are used meaningfully. Most often, these schemes are reduced to being ends in themselves and are in no way connected to better learning, quality education or equal schooling opportunities.

The assumption that has perhaps the most serious repercussions is that incentives can substitute for inadequacies in the learning environment. The belief that incentives offer immediate gratification was also found to be fallacious as there was a perpetual delay in receiving them. Moreover, these sops, even if received in time, cannot match up to the gratification that one may at least hope to get on completion of schooling. The assumption that parents may send their children to schools in return for a few sops was found to be deeply problematic in its implications for schooling for poor children. Parents saw linkages of education with employment, financial independence and upward mobility. However, they were totally disillusioned with the kind of schooling that their children were getting. They did not want their children to just go to school but also learn and felt that most schools either did not treat their children with dignity or did not teach them adequately enough. Parents of children who have dropped out were unequivocal in saying that they wanted "good quality education" for their children. They were clear that if schools were good and the teachers taught well, that would indeed be the biggest incentive for them. The other incentive which could perhaps work well was additional support in the form of extra classes as they were unable to monitor their children's work at home.

8 Conclusions

This paper tries to examine the assumptions underlying educational incentive schemes with the help of data collected on execution of three such schemes for children of minority communities in Maharashtra. Though several lacunae have been highlighted in their implementation, the objective is not to condemn all such schemes. However, it is fairly evident that for such schemes to be of real value, they cannot function in isolation but must be comprehensive and understand the lives of people they are meant for and the difficulties that they face, both at home and in school. Communities living in different regions, despite several differences among them tend to get homogenised under such schemes and are treated alike. Therefore, it is important to understand the uniqueness and specific problems faced by them and conceptualise the schemes accordingly. Well-designed surveys could be planned and executed towards this end.

However, providing equitable good quality education to all children is the responsibility of the state and, no matter how well-designed and well-executed the incentive schemes for the disadvantaged may be, they can never substitute a good learning environment in school, both in terms of infrastructure (laboratories, libraries, playgrounds, toilets) and vibrant

pedagogic space, which has sufficient properly employed, well-qualified and trained teachers.

All parents and children want good education, which will help them move up the socio-economic ladder and help break the vicious cycle of disadvantage and poverty.

Educational incentives at most can provide important but temporary relief and should not be considered as the main motivating factor for parents to send their children to school and for children to be in schools and learning as well.

NOTES

- 1 Incidentally, the school uniform and AA schemes, which remained functional for four years have recently been withdrawn by Minority Development Department due to problems in implementation and existence of similar such schemes under SSA.
- 2 There is a huge variety in the comprehensiveness of such schemes. For instance, all children (Junior KG to X) studying in Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation schools in Mumbai get around 27 items – ranging from school uniforms, raincoats, pencil boxes to school bags, etc. Another Education Trust, Pardada Pardadi Education Society, working in Bulandshahar, UP has a fairly elaborate incentive scheme for girls from SC, ST, OBC communities which includes uniforms, books, stationery, shoes, three meals a day and also tetanus, hepatitis, polio vaccinations, including provision of transport facilities. It also deposits Rs 10 per day in their bank account, which upon graduation may be used by them for continuing their studies or marriage, etc. Families whose daughters complete schooling are also provided with toilets.
- 3 Even the Minority and Adult Education Department did not have adequate data on the total number of minority students studying in each district. This made it difficult for them to estimate and prepare a comprehensive budget that would be required under this scheme.
- 4 This information is based on our interview with joint director, Minority and Adult Education Department.

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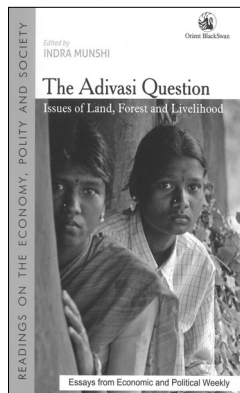
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The Adivasi Question

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Depletion and destruction of forests have eroded the already fragile survival base of adivasis across the country, displacing an alarmingly large number of adivasis to make way for development projects. Many have been forced to migrate to other rural areas or cities in search of work, leading to systematic alienation.

This volume situates the issues concerning the adivasis in a historical context while discussing the challenges they face today.

The introduction examines how the loss of land and livelihood began under the British administration, making the adivasis dependent on the landlord-moneylender-trader nexus for their survival.

The articles, drawn from writings of almost four decades in EPW, discuss questions of community rights and ownership, management of forests, the state's rehabilitation policies, and the Forest Rights Act and its implications. It presents diverse perspectives in the form of case studies specific to different regions and provides valuable analytical insights.

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