

## UTTAR PRADESH

# Wanted: School Teachers

Several surveys in recent years have put forward a rosy picture of the state of elementary education in Uttar Pradesh. Most show schools in UP as brimming with children; but they also refer to the grim shortage of teachers. These surveys include those conducted by the HRD, NCERT as well as other semi-government surveys such as the NSSO, Census of India and the NFHS. *India Today's* survey of Indian states projects Uttar Pradesh along with three other Indian states, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, as being able to bring down the level of illiteracy between 2001 and 2020. The National Institute of Educational Planning and Assessment (NIEPA) recently released its report based on the District Information System for Education. The survey also covered all 70 districts of UP.

Till the early 1990s, the most striking weakness of the schooling system in rural Uttar Pradesh was not so much the deficiency of physical infrastructure as the poor functioning of existing facilities and the other problem was endemic teacher absenteeism and shirking. The state, however, has shown considerable success in the implementation of educational achievement programmes introduced over the last decade – beginning with Operation Blackboard (OB, 1987), District Primary Education Programme (DPEP, 1995) and more recently, the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA).

Uttar Pradesh has reported the highest number of schools, 1,19,443. This is more than in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. First under DPEP and later under SSA,

33,452 new schools were opened in UP in the last decade. The percentage of new schools with a building was found to be as high as 96.95 per cent. But the number of schools without buildings is 2.48 per cent, which in absolute numbers makes for a very high figure, 2,474 schools. In 2003, 91.51 per cent of UP's primary schools were in the rural areas. Moreover, the share of primary schools to total schools in UP is 83.54 per cent, a percentage higher than states like Karnataka (50.23 per cent), West Bengal (82.87 per cent). Most primary schools are run by the department of education or local bodies. In the last decade or so, however, Uttar Pradesh has seen an exponential growth in the number of private schools – most are upper primary schools that extend up to secondary and higher secondary levels.

UP's high Gender Parity Index of 0.90, as against the all-India GPI of 0.89 in primary classes, means there has been some success in bringing girls into school. The highest enrolment of scheduled castes is seen in the case of Uttar Pradesh – 31.9 per cent. Uttar Pradesh, however, continues to have the highest pupil-teacher ratio (1:67) after Bihar (1:83). The percentage of primary schools with a pupil-teacher ratio of above 100 is 24.2. A large number of schools also (19.1 per cent of total primary schools) are single-teacher schools.

Contrary to other surveys, the NIEPA study reveals that numbers of teachers have shown an impressive growth. Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of teachers in primary schools – 0.27 million or 17 per cent of the total primary teachers in the country. One of the provisions of OB was to provide at least two teachers to each of the primary schools covered under the scheme. Across India, on an average a primary school has more than two (2.64) teachers; Uttar Pradesh is close to this average in government-run schools, while in private managed schools it is 4.5. There are, however, no teachers in 1.25 per cent primary schools (0.85 schools in rural areas), i.e., nearly 1,550 schools. Uttar Pradesh is also one of few states where number of trained teachers records a higher percentage of teachers in primary schools (57.3 per cent). Moreover, 'para teachers' appointed under DPEP are better qualified than regular teachers. More than half of the para teachers (56.02 per cent) are graduates and above; while only 0.87 per cent para teachers are below secondary level.

The expansion of upper primary education also depends on the transition rate from primary to upper primary level of education. Across India, more than 64 per cent children transit from primary to upper primary level of education. While in Kerala, the transition rate is 95 per cent, it is only 40.22 per cent in UP. Without improving the transition rate, it seems the goal of universal elementary education in UP may not be realised in the near future.

The NIEPA study does show that UP, under DPEP, has done better than other states, more so in the preparation of new texts. The state is among the few that have preserved a place for drawing and art in the elementary school curriculum. What UP now needs is a few lakh professionally qualified teachers to take advantage of the surge of public interest in education. Moreover, in recent years, DPEP has seen a sharp reduction in allocation over the years, and other programmes including OB are now subsumed under the SSA. **EPW**