

Private Schools for Less Privileged

Some Insights from a Case Study

The 1990s saw a surge in parental demand for education which prompted a new phenomenon, the growth of small fee-charging private schools for the less privileged. While this development has been welcomed by education bureaucrats, there has been little research on these schools, which often because they remained 'unrecognised' even missed statistical surveys. This paper reports a small field study of these schools in one district each in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

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The post-NPE 1986 era witnessed a spate of educational initiatives both national and foreign funded, ranging from the Total Literacy Campaign and Operation Blackboard to DPEP and Lok Jumbish. Attention was concentrated on building up parental demand for education and on expanding and improving the government school system especially at primary level. Field surveys in the 1990s began to report a surge in parental demand for education – and accompanying this a new phenomenon – small fee-charging private schools for the less privileged. It appeared that low income groups were not only wanting education but they were willing to pay for it. The new phenomenon was welcomed by education bureaucrats. The government system was struggling with both access and retention issues and many felt that the new private schools could be allies in achieving UEE. However, even by the end of the 1990s little research had been done on these schools, and in fact on the private sector in schooling in general (De, Noronha, Samson and Majumdar 2002:131, 133). Many of these schools were 'unrecognised' and were therefore even missing from statistical surveys (De, Noronha, Samson and Majumdar 2002:131, 133). This paper is based on data from a small field study undertaken from October-December 1999 in order to understand these private schools.

Available macro-level data indicated that high private participation rates in elementary schooling existed in both prosperous and less prosperous states. For our survey Haryana was taken as an example of the former and Uttar Pradesh of the latter. Rajasthan, in the same region, was also interesting. Evidence suggests that, in spite of the low level of private sector participation in schools, the private unaided sector

was absorbing most of the increase in enrolment in the state. Six locations in these three states were identified, one urban and one rural area in an educationally disadvantaged district in each state. The sample districts were Bhiwani in Haryana, Rampur in UP and Dhaulpur in Rajasthan. In the three district headquarters, care was taken to identify 2-4 contiguous wards where the economically disadvantaged resided, and where there was a sufficient concentration of private schools. In rural areas, village clusters, 10-15 kms away from the district headquarters, with high private school development were chosen. These became the sample areas. A census of all the schools in the sample area was undertaken and some basic information was collected about each school. In the next stage about 12 schools were chosen randomly from the list for a detailed survey; care was taken to ensure inclusion of different types of management, particularly private unaided schools. In addition 50 households in each sample area, chosen through circular random sampling, were also surveyed. Since the survey intended to look at schooling issues, only families with at least one child enrolled between classes 1-8 formed the household sample. (A neighbouring household was taken where necessary.) Data was collected on all the children in the household and more detailed information pertaining to the one child enrolled in classes 1-8. If households had more than one child in this category, one was selected randomly from them for a more detailed survey.

All three sample districts had a largely agrarian economy and both rural Dhaulpur and rural Bhiwani samples were dominated by large and prosperous villages. The small, poor and backward villages of rural Rampur were a complete contrast. Urban Bhiwani

was much the most prosperous of the six areas and only here were elite private schools accessed by a few households in the sample. In both rural and urban Bhiwani non-enrolled children were rare. Again, this was a complete contrast to rural Rampur where there were entire sections where no enrolled child could be found. Female literacy, according to the 1991 Census, varies from the 35 per cent of Bhiwani to the 15 per cent of Dhaulpur and Rampur. Generalising from this small and diverse sample is difficult. We did not attempt to measure the incidence of private schools; instead we focused on rural areas and on disadvantaged urban areas where many private schools had come up. We talked with parents, teachers and children to gain insights into schooling options for the disadvantaged in these areas.

The paper is divided into two parts. Part I sums up the major findings. It deals with the striking features of the schooling scene including the fall in government school quality and the significant role played by the private unaided sector. Then it focuses on the quality of the new private schools, their cost and their clientele. Next we explore the reasons for the rapid growth of the private unaided sector and for the nature of its growth. In the process we have to look at the role of the government in this scenario. Part II looks at the issues that this situation brings to the fore particularly as regards the implications for UEE.

I

Some Significant Findings

School Development

Although the survey did concentrate on disadvantaged areas it was interesting to find that the six samples varied greatly in terms of the educational facilities to which

they had access. This is not obvious from secondary sources such as the SAIES since district-level figures for schooling facilities are not easily available. Urban Bhiwani (also the most prosperous area) with its ample provision of schooling facilities ranging all the way to the senior secondary level is at the upper end of the spectrum and rural Rampur (also economically the poorest area) with no secondary school at all is the worst off (Table 1). Table 2 shows that school participation varies correspondingly— as much as 20 per cent of children in urban and rural Bhiwani were enrolled at secondary and higher secondary levels while in rural Rampur this came down to 2 per cent.

In the last 10 years, no new government schools have been set up in urban areas. Even in rural areas, the proportion of new schools was very low (30 per cent), especially compared to the private unaided sector which has been mushrooming rapidly. About 70 per cent of these schools have come up in the last 10 years.

In the urban areas, many government schools functioned in rented buildings and very old ones at that. Most buildings were dangerously old and dilapidated and all primary schools complained of acute shortage of space. When the school could no longer operate from its rented space both in urban Bhiwani and in urban Rampur, it simply moved into another school. So three or four schools could operate in the same premises. In one large school building, for example, three rooms were occupied by one primary school, and two other primary schools occupied two other rooms. The rest of the building was unuseable. In other words, the situation for government primary schools here is not zero growth but negative growth. Children were often in unprotected spaces – in verandahs with men playing cards near them (urban Bhiwani), for example. In urban Dhaulpur, a government primary school has been operating for 15 years under the ‘chhatris’ (umbrellas) of a monument, unprotected from sun and rain. To access the government schools children had to walk long distances and cross busy roads. According to teachers, they did so for the dry rations not for schooling. In rural areas, except for Bhiwani, children were crammed into one or two classrooms. On the whole, children were not comfortable, nor was the environment secure, or conducive to learning.

During the survey, the pulse polio campaign was going on. It completely disrupted teaching activity in the primary

schools, rural and urban, leading to closure of schools for 2-3 days in some cases. But notwithstanding the overall casual atmosphere the odd government primary school appeared to function well, and we also met young children who were able to read.

Secondary level government schools functioned much better and had better infrastructure. They were relatively few in number and generally had classes 6-10 or 6-12. The government girls’ secondary schools in both rural Bhiwani and rural Dhaulpur enjoyed an excellent reputation.

As we can see from Table 2 (the total number of enrolled children in the sample areas), and Table 3 (the numbers enrolled in private schools in all six sites), the majority of children in the urban samples were in private schools.¹ The proportion of those going to private schools is lower in the rural samples but is still considerable in Bhiwani and Dhaulpur and somewhat less in Rampur. Enrolment in private schools attended by sample households was largely at the primary level though there was substantial enrolment at the upper primary level as well (Table 3). The pre-primary section had a high proportion of the enrolment.

About six of the 300 households could access schools which the middle class

associates with the term ‘private schools’.² These schools would run from class 1 up to secondary level; would have trained, often experienced teachers; and an adequate number of classrooms with sufficient air and light, library, laboratories and grounds with play equipment. The general picture was quite different in our study. The heterogeneity of the private schooling scene and its uneven development across the samples and across schooling levels is easily observable in Table 4. There were aided and unaided private schools of different levels, and among the latter there were recognised and unrecognised schools.³

A few points can be highlighted: Aided schools were few, found only in urban areas, and none less than 30 years old. The majority were in urban Bhiwani, at secondary as well as primary level. Most of these schools belonged to an earlier philanthropic era when private donations provided very good infrastructure. However, they were found to be charging high fees. The sole aided school in Dhaulpur, and the sole aided school in Rampur had modest infrastructure and fees at government school level. Aided schools were a valued good in short supply.

Unaided schools set up in the late 1970s

Table 1: Total Number of Schools in Six Sample Areas

	Urban			Rural		
	Bhiwani	Dhaulpur	Rampur	Bhiwani	Dhaulpur	Rampur
Primary	23	12	24	7	8	12
Upper primary	9	18	9	9	8	1
Secondary/ Sr secondary	14	7	1	3	2	0
Total	46	37	34	19	18	13

Notes: Schools with classes 1-5, 1-8, 1-10, 1-12 may or may not have a pre-primary section. Primary schools have classes 1-5, upper primary have classes 1-8 or 6-8, secondary or senior secondary have classes 1-10, 1-12, 6-10, or 6-12.

Table 2: Number of Children Enrolled in Sample Households

No of Children Enrolled in	Urban			Rural		
	Bhiwani	Dhaulpur	Rampur	Bhiwani	Dhaulpur	Rampur
Classes 1 – 5*	74 (59.2)	92 (67.7)	88 (63.8)	71 (57.3)	79 (67.5)	104 (89.7)
Classes 6 – 8	26 (20.8)	32 (23.5)	29 (21.0)	32 (25.8)	24 (20.5)	10 (8.6)
Classes 9 – 12	25 (20.0)	12 (8.8)	21 (15.2)	21 (16.9)	14 (12.0)	2 (1.7)
Total	125 (100)	136 (100)	118 (100)	124 (100)	117 (100)	116 (100)

Notes: * Includes children enrolled in the pre-primary classes. Sample households had at least one child currently enrolled between classes 1-8.

Table 3: Number of Children Enrolled in Private Schools in Sample Households

No of Children Enrolled in:	Urban			Rural		
	Bhiwani	Dhaulpur	Rampur	Bhiwani	Dhaulpur	Rampur
Classes 1 – 5*	53	64	65	38	40	34
Classes 6 – 8	19	18	16	18	9	2
Classes 9 – 12	12	5	6	11	1	1
Total	84	87	87	67	50	37

Notes: * Includes children enrolled in the pre-primary classes. Sample households had at least one child currently enrolled between classes 1-8.

and 1980s were also different. Though they had less magnificent infrastructure, it was adequate and the schools also had different types of curricular activities. Such schools included the popular Adarsh Vidya Mandir of urban Dhaulpur and its counterpart in rural Dhaulpur as well as a Muslim trust school in urban Rampur.

No category or sub-category was homogeneous. Let alone unrecognised schools even recognised schools could range from reasonable to disastrous. Neither was any category confined to one level though primary level private schools were most numerous in Rampur, upper primary in Dhaulpur and higher levels in Bhiwani. None of the better quality schools in any category, not even those with modest fees, were accessed easily by the majority of our sample households. Most were in medium and low fee schools more like those described in the next section although here too there is a spectrum.

New Private Schools

Quality

The new schools were often set up in part of the owner's house. Even when the school had its own premises, and even in the recognised schools, rooms were small and congested. Sounds from one classroom impinged on others. A small courtyard could function as the playground for over 200 children... Little children – almost all private schools had a pre-school section – were also cooped up in small rooms. In urban areas schools usually had desks and chairs rather than duris, a feature that parents appreciated. Often the unrecognised schools were newer and had even poorer infrastructure. The exception was urban Rampur where an unrecognised charitable trust school running up to upper primary level was functioning with community support; this school had excellent infrastructure.

Although rooms were pokey, private schools often looked more inviting than government schools because maintenance was better. In the urban areas, especially, since schools often benefited from being in the owner's house – basic facilities like drinking water and toilet, electricity and fans were generally available. On the other hand, teaching aids were often missing and libraries non-existent, as were playgrounds.⁴

An important plus point of many of these private schools is the low pupil-teacher

ratio. True that this is more by default than by design because most of these schools are struggling to increase enrolment. The more successful schools have a higher pupil-teacher ratio. Multigrade teaching is also common. The biggest minus point was that few schools had trained teachers. They were often so young, and inexperienced, that parents complained. Even in the recognised schools there was high turnover, i.e., teachers rarely stayed long. A striking example comes from rural Bhiwani which had the best developed private schooling system accessed by disadvantaged parents. In the two recognised schools both around 10 years old, five of the nine teachers in one school and seven of the 12 in the other had been around for less than a year. These were both upper primary schools like the two best unrecognised schools in the area. In the latter schools, each with seven staff members, not a single one had any kind of training.

But there is no gainsaying the fact that private schools were generally hard at work with their charges. This sheer abundance of teaching time, whatever the competence of the teachers involved would definitely have some impact. Many of these schools also scored points by increasing the number of working days as compared to government schools. Homework and tests were a regular feature and are part of the better achievement associated with these schools.

Curriculum in the private schools was the standard curriculum of other schools, both government and elite private. In fact, much of the stress on English, and on prescribing many textbooks, came from imitating the latter group of schools. Teaching methods were conventional. Much emphasis was placed on rote learning and written work. 'Kunjis' (inferior guidebooks) were found in schoolbags of

older children. Schools took pride in their teaching of English – the nursery rhymes, the 'Good Morning' and the grammar. There was little stress on activities other than academic although most schools claimed to be having extra-curricular activities. Even inter-school competitions organised in rural Bhiwani private schools – and these were among the best of the new schools – were organised around doing better at the class eight examinations.

No formal achievement test was administered during this survey and perhaps these small private schools need to be assessed. The fact that the parents are spending money to send their children to the private schools is telling by itself. One can assuredly say that private schools are delivering more than government schools (which does not necessarily mean a lot). It is also true that some teachers indicated that government/aided schools at secondary level preferred children from private primary schools and this is a valid achievement test for parents.

School achievement is a complex area where school input combines with parental support and the willingness/aptitude of the individual child. Private school input is regular but not as we see of high quality. The family background of private school children is generally socially and economically stronger than that of government school children as we can see from Table 7. At the same time it is not clear that parents with children in private schools are giving them so much extra support. From Table 5, one sees that even in private schools, only around 50 per cent of the sample children received help with their homework. Tuition was not much a part of the culture except in urban Dhaulpur and urban Rampur where it impacted both government and private school children.

Table 4: Number and Type of Private Schools in Sample Areas

	Urban			Rural		
	Bhiwani	Dhaulpur	Rampur	Bhiwani	Dhaulpur	Rampur
Private unaided recognised	14	24	15	3	5	2
Primary	2	3	9	0	1	2
Upper primary	4	16	6	3	5	0
Secondary/Sr sec	8	5	0	0	0	0
Private unaided unrecognised	14	4	11	9	3	6
Primary	9	4	10	3	3	6
Upper primary	5	0	1	6	0	0
Secondary/Sr sec	0	0	0	0	0	0
Private aided	6	1	1	0	0	0
Primary	3	0	0	0	0	0
Upper primary	0	1	1	0	0	0
Secondary/Sr sec	3	0	0	0	0	0
Total	36	29	27	12	9	8

Notes: Primary schools have classes 1–5, upper primary have classes 1-8 or 6-8, secondary or senior secondary schools have classes 1-10, 1-12, 6-10, or 6-12.

Cost

Fees increased with progress up the schooling ladder with pre-primary level (this could be 2-3 years) costing the least. The new schools added one more layer of stratification to an already stratified system. Urban areas showed the gap between schooling for the less privileged and for the even less privileged in its most acute form. There were a large number of schools where fees ranged from Rs 15 to Rs 50. But there were a few prized schools in the range of Rs 150 per month. Rural parents possibly had less paying capacity: schools had a much smaller range of fees – in fact, in our poorest area, rural Rampur, parents were often unable even to pay monthly school fees of Rs 15 to Rs 20 for months at a time. Even the most prosperous rural area – rural Bhiwani had fees ranging between Rs 30 to Rs 80 per month.

To study the cost of schooling, children were divided into four categories, those enrolled in government schools, low fee private schools, medium fee private schools and high fee private schools. Since cost of schooling seemed to increase as one went up the schooling ladder, the primary and upper primary level were looked at separately. As expected, children in government primary schools have the lowest expenditure (Rs 500) and the expenditure involved rises sharply for each category of private primary school. There is also a rough proportionality between fee and non-fee expenditure. In other words, schools that charge high fees also require proportionately higher non-fee expenditure. This also explains why it is only parents from a less disadvantaged socio-economic background that can send their children to high fee schools.

The total number of children attending school at upper primary level was much smaller. Cost may be an excluding factor since fees are higher whatever the type of school. In fact, the expenditure on a child in a private school with fees below Rs 1,200 was only 25 per cent more than that involved for a child in a government school (Table 6). Dropout rates are also high because of high and increasing indirect costs, lack of home support and poor teaching at the primary level. More children go to government schools at the upper primary level and the very low fee private schools do not exist at all possibly because they are not sustainable. Private schools accessed at this level can be analysed in two groups: annual fees below Rs 1,200 and above Rs 1,200. Some explanation for

this completely different scenario at upper primary level seems possible. Government schools usually had the upper primary section as part of the secondary schools and therefore presented a more attractive option. Private upper-primary schools had to perform better if they were to attract their clientele.

Clientele – Class, Caste and Gender and Choice

The asset ownership position confirms that private school children come from somewhat better-off families. Associated with this are all the advantages of better health, nutrition, self-esteem, and awareness. The government primary school clientele appears most disadvantaged whereas those in government secondary schools are accessing a good which is in short supply and often of better quality as well. Table 7 shows this. The latter group (includes all levels in government schools) are much closer to those in private schools. Obviously the groups overlap. Some of those currently enrolled in government secondary schools may well have gone to private schools earlier.

Macro-level data indicate that going to a private school is a mark of social privilege and that, for example, rural SC females are very unlikely to find themselves in a private school. Some change has taken place with the new type of schools as we see in Table 7. If we look at the occupation and caste distribution of private school clientele we find that 18 per cent of private school parents were wage labour, and 20 per cent were scheduled caste. In other words, there are private schools which are being accessed by a significant number of these very disadvantaged groups. The gender problem requires special discussion. Putting both qualitative data and quantitative data (Table 8) together, it is possible to make a few suggestions.

If children were enrolled in school, then it was common to find all children enrolled

in the chosen school. But there were isolated examples of what seemed like clear gender bias with the boy in private school and the girl in government school. Gender bias was much clearer at the level of deciding whether or not to enrol the child in any school at all. This was the case in the poorest region – rural Rampur. It was very common to find girls never enrolled even among families which had a currently enrolled boy (sometimes in private school).

For one thing, many more girls than boys dropped out by primary level usually because of parental pressure. Secondly, at this stage a higher proportion of girls was in government schools.⁵ The bias was even stronger in rural areas with the majority of girls in government schools and most boys in private schools.

Very vulnerable families who were trying private schools at the bottom end of the spectrum, initially often sent all their children to government school. When they found they were making little progress, they might take one or more children out

Table 6: Annual Household Expenditure Per Child on Schooling (Rs)

	School Fees Per Annum	Total Expenditure on Schooling
Primary level: for a child enrolled in government school	47	499
Private (fees below Rs 600) school	420	1373
Private (fees between Rs 600 and Rs 1200) school	857	2427
Private (fees greater than Rs 1200) school	2733	6124
Upper primary level: for a child enrolled in government school	107	1579
Private (fees below Rs 1200) school	753	1967
Private (fees greater than Rs 1200) school	3480	5924

Notes: Total expenditure includes school fees, expenditure on stationery, textbooks, uniform, transport, private tuition and other costs associated with schooling. These were parents' estimates with respect to selected children in sample households.

Table 5: Availability of Home Support in Different Areas by School Type

Proportion of Children* Enrolled in	Urban			Rural		
	Bhiwani	Dhaulpur	Rampur	Bhiwani	Dhaulpur	Rampur
Government schools with families:						
With literate adult females	33	41	41	11	19	17
Who help with homework	22	36	59	44	23	6
Who have arranged private tuition	0	23	41	6	15	3
Private schools with families:						
With literate adult females	55	50	51	44	52	10
Who help with homework	41	47	60	61	44	45
Who have arranged private tuition	10	50	49	6	23	0

Note: * Responses were with respect to selected children from sample households.

and put them into private schools. The privileged ones were often boys.

Few parents could access what they felt was 'a good school': one with good infrastructure, different activities, playing facilities and committed and encouraging teachers. It appears that parents are looking for a school of decent quality and affordable fees within a reasonable distance (Table 9). Interestingly, English, which private schools looked on as their main USP seems to hold less importance, than the promise of better achievement held out by their teaching activity.

Parents face a difficult choice between low quality and no quality at primary level – and the enrolment in the new schools is mainly at this level. Government schools could be absent (urban areas), or dysfunctional (rural Rampur), or just casual. Parents often helplessly observe while their child struggles through government primary school and after two or three years of such struggle they put him in the nursery class of a (possibly low quality) private school out of desperation. Often the government school parents have little idea that their child has not learned much. Of course, it is only fair to point out that there were also cases where parents were disillusioned with private schools and moved helplessly from one to the other and even went back to the government school. Secondly, the poaching from government schools and from other private schools is also actively pursued by private school entrepreneurs.

The cost of private schooling is still an excluding factor both for access and for sustaining the enterprise – and those who choose private schools in spite of low and uncertain earning capacity may be sacrificing much. In urban Rampur and urban Dhaulpur, which seemed fairly alert about educational support, private tuition was also a significant part of the cost for many families. An unpleasant aspect of the non-fee expenditure (Table 6) was that it often comprised items like belts and ties, and shoes and socks. Sometimes, many textbooks were prescribed even for small classes. In addition, there were hidden costs like, for example, the cost of a picnic or field trip in the more ambitious private schools.

Factors Leading to Increased Presence of These Schools

As suggested by earlier studies the new schools are responding to an increased demand for education and for schooling from low income groups. This demand has

been stimulated by the widespread understanding that education is linked with employment opportunities and upward mobility. But it is partly also a creation of state sponsored schemes like literacy campaigns, NFE schemes and new incentives like dry rations, etc. The poor quality (and even poor availability in urban areas) of government primary schooling has frustrated this demand (the exception was rural Bhiwani where government school infrastructure was reasonably good). In contrast to government schools, private schools gave a serious atmosphere and concentrated on teaching. These schools were able to show indicators of achievement. This could range from a smattering of English nursery rhymes, knowledge of the alphabet, and some literacy and numeracy. Even the schooling readiness provided by pre-primary schooling was wanted by parents. Private school children had better chance of accessing the restricted supply of better quality government/aided schooling at higher levels.

Rampant educated unemployment created the willing supply factor. The supply of such schools is in fact so abundant that in many cases it seems to be creating the demand. We came across a schooling situation of great fluidity: entrepreneurs

wooing poor parents, schools breaking up or closing down because of manipulation among this group or because of over supply. In rural areas the prospect of opening a private school is exciting for the local notables including the sarpanch. At primary level little investment is needed and regulations seem easily flouted. The government has greatly diluted norms for schooling and is, at least in Rajasthan, coaxing private parties to open schools. The supply of teachers willing to work for a pittance is also abundant.

At higher levels of schooling neither demand nor supply factors are currently strong enough to create the same phenomenon. For one thing, many children do not survive primary schooling. Also, cost of schooling for parents rises sharply even in government schools. Secondly, government schools at upper primary/secondary level, though in short supply, enjoy higher state subsidy, which makes for better infrastructure. They also have a better teaching learning environment. Since upper primary level is integrated with senior/senior secondary level for the most part, parents have a less expensive opportunity to reach secondary level. (Aided schools in the sample had similar advantages.) All things considered parents would therefore

Table 7: Characteristics of Sample Households

	Families with Children Enrolled in		
	Government Primary Schools	All Government Schools	Private Schools
Proportion (per cent) of families whose main earning activity is:			
Wage labour (agricultural / non-agricultural)	45	33	18
Employment (temporary / permanent)	9	19	36
Proportion (per cent) of families owning:			
TV	29	44	69
Refrigerator	0	6	27
Motorcycle	5	7	17
Proportion (per cent) of families who are:			
SC	38	34	20
OBC	17	15	14
Other Hindus	15	22	39
Muslims	29	28	27
From other religions	1	1	Negligible

Note: Sample households had at least one child currently enrolled between classes 1-8.

Table 8: Enrolled Children from Sample Households by School Management, Gender and Location

	Proportion (Per Cent) of Children Enrolled in:			
	Classes 1 to 5		Classes 6 to 8	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Urban areas				
Government school	29.1	27.4	27.5	55.6
Private school	70.9	72.6	72.5	44.4
Rural areas				
Government school	55.0	57.7	41.2	71.9
Private school	45.0	42.3	58.8	28.1

Note: Sample households had at least one child currently enrolled between classes 1-8.

stand to lose much more if they abandon government schooling for upper primary classes in the unaided sector. On the supply side, the level of investment now involved in order to set up a private school is higher (norms are more demanding) and there is an inbuilt accountability mechanism in the Board results. More rooms, better teachers, better facilities all make cost higher.

Recognition Norms and Quality Schooling

The recognition system has a strong influence on quality of schooling. But it is recognised secondary schools which are comparatively better. These are generally for a more advantaged group.

Government has tried to foster privatisation in different ways – commonly by diluting the norms. In Dhaulpur the norms were so ‘dilute’ as to be almost non-existent. But for elementary level the system has failed due to many contributory factors: Private school owners find compliance a difficult task – difficult conditions as well as bureaucratic harassment. Education officers complained that the owners are dishonest: schools which do not exist are shown in premises which they do not own. Chances are that schools often function at a level beyond that for which they have got recognition. At least this seemed to be the case with two recognised schools in rural Bhiwani, which had begun to call themselves secondary schools. The schools did not even have the infrastructure said to be mandatory at upper primary level, i.e., the playground, laboratory, etc. Unrecognised schools had an understanding with recognised schools so they too could satisfactorily survive at a price by sending their students for exams at the recognised school.

However, the norms do appear to be supplying some benchmark against which schools can measure themselves if only for the recognition badge which enables them to send children for the school leaving examinations or to other recognised schools at this or higher stage. The unrecognised schools appear to be using the recognised schools as a standard. This benchmark function is vital particularly because government schools themselves are not working according to norms. Interestingly, low cost private schools concentrate on giving good teaching time rather than good infrastructure. They can invest only to a limited extent in infrastructure.

One complication in rural Bhiwani was the involvement of the sarpanch. “How can the sarpanch look after the performance of government school teachers when he is running the biggest private school in the village,” asked the local DPEP representative.

II New Development and UEE

The new schools add more tracks to the schooling system, this time among the less privileged. The development reinforces the duality and elitism inherent in private schooling without ensuring quality or coverage. Although government welcomes the sharing of its burden it must be remembered that while the sharing of management burden is done by the entrepreneur it is the disadvantaged parent who bears the costs. This is a difficult and often unsustainable burden. In the new schools, it is commerce not philanthropy which is the driving force. The quality of school is likely to be low, proportional to the limited input from disadvantaged parents in terms of fees, etc., and in terms of home support.

In all three urban samples, access to school in urban areas is largely through private schools especially those of the new variety. This has been precipitated by government retreat. But even in rural areas, poorly monitored government schools have created a good field for the new private schools. However, cost remains an excluding factor for private schooling. The very

poor are dependent on government schools and in fact can generally access only the government primary schools seen to be the worst in the sector. This, too, is a cause for concern. It is also important to note that not just the very poor, the majority of families are dependent on the government for upper primary schooling. The supply of these schools is woefully inadequate – and crucial for UEE.

The survey concentrated on district headquarters and rural areas with private school development (all were accessible). Even in this limited sample of families already motivated for schooling – all have at least one child enrolled in elementary classes – and notwithstanding the wooing of private entrepreneurs, the number of out of school children remains sizeable. Girls are especially at risk in this region of high gender bias. Notice that the figures for out of school girls in rural Rampur is close to 80 per cent in the older age group and around 50 per cent in the younger age group. Prosperous rural Bhiwani with its comparatively well developed government and private school system also had around ¼ of girls in the older age group out of school. Older boys are also heavily at risk.

The picture would have been more dismal had we included in the sample families with all children non-enrolled. This is a definite indication, if such was needed, of the inadvisability of relying on private initiatives of this type for UEE. These market-driven ventures will not for example be battling the inertia of poor

Table 9: Criteria for Choice of School in Sample Households
(Per cent)

Proportion of Parents Who Considered the Following as Important Criterion for Choice of School:	Urban	Rural
Distance from home	50	34
Reputation of the school or teachers	50	49
Cost of schooling	50	46
Teach English	14	15
Availability of extra curricular activity	15	14
Board results	13	13

Notes: The options are not mutually exclusive.

The responses of parents are with respect to the selected child in the sample households.

Table 10: Proportion (Per Cent) of Non-Enrolled Children among Sample Households

Non-enrolled Children in:	Urban			Rural		
	Bhiwani	Dhaulpur	Rampur	Bhiwani	Dhaulpur	Rampur
6-10 age group						
Boys	9	2	7	9	3	19
Girls	4	13	8	9	11	46
11-14 age group						
Boys	11	15	25	16	12	6
Girls	16	12	6	24	17	79

Note: Sample households had at least one child currently enrolled between classes 1-8.

parents dependent on the wages or the household help of boys and especially girls, or the vested interests of employers of child labour. This is one of the major challenges of UEE. There are a few (relative to the enormity of the task) education initiatives run by NGOs in difficult urban areas and in remote unserved rural areas, which are doing such tasks. They rely on mainstreaming children into the government schooling system.

Retention issues are crucial for UEE. Qualitative data indicates that children from the better private schools are better able to access the next level of schooling. But as the survey indicates there is a segmentation in the new private schools. It is possible that the many deprived children are exposed to barely competent teaching. Nor can families support their schooling. Aided schools are too few to be making an impact.

The regulatory mechanism of 'recognition norms' has failed to ensure a minimum acceptable norm of quality schooling even though norms have been diluted to an almost poverty line level. Market forces dictate that if the government schools functioned at a reasonable level private schools would be forced to follow suit or forced out of business. This is in fact indicated by rural Bhiwani which had the best functioning government school system and the best functioning private school system as well.

In terms of learning achievement no miracles can be expected from this sector. The usual curriculum with all its decontextualised as well as heavy content remains the curriculum for private schools. In fact, much time is devoted to English teaching – the showpiece of private schools, again it appears, through rote learning, grammatical exercises, etc. In spite of pre-primary schooling for two to three years we met many children lost in the maze of movement from government to private or even from private to private school.⁶

Given the shortage of government schools, the enormity of the task, and the tremendous need for quality, there is no real advantage to be gained from allowing government schools to rot – in any case a slow, cumbersome and wasteful procedure. Government could also harness the energies and enthusiasm of the new entrepreneurs in the cause of schooling. – with adequate assistance and regulation. The system should also be more transparent for parents. Raising the quality of schools in both sectors. will give parents a more

meaningful set of choices and contribute to UEE. [EPW](mailto:cord204@hotmail.com)

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Notes

[This is the second part of a study on private schools. The first part was a desk study of secondary data on private schooling done by the authors along with Manabi Majumdar. See 'Private Schools and Universal Elementary Education' in R Govinda (ed), (2002), *India Education Report*, NIEPA and OUP.]

- 1 See Introduction above which stresses that sample areas were chosen for concentration of private schools.
- 2 All six were in urban Bhiwani and were more advantaged households. Fees ranged from Rs 350 to Rs 500 per month. The only new elite private school which was found was in rural Rampur, the poorest area. Fees were Rs 250

per month. Parents here found Rs 15 to Rs 20 difficult to sustain.

- 3 Aided schools have the benefit of private management. Since government pays teachers' salaries, fees are supposed to be pegged at government school level. Unaided schools qualify for 'recognition' by the department of education if they follow certain minimum standards of quality laid down by the department.
- 4 Quantitative information on infrastructure makes these schools sound better than they actually are since claims were often exaggerated or downright untruths.
- 5 The few government secondary schools for girls were good – and beneficial for the enrolment of girls.
- 6 Bashir researching in a state where government schooling on the whole is better than that in northern states – and therefore the new private schools can be expected to be better, finds that learning achievement is a bare literacy and numeracy. See Sajitha Bashir (1994), "Public versus private in primary education: comparisons of school effectiveness and costs in Tamil Nadu", unpublished PhD thesis, LSE.