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## Primary School Drop-outs

Much of the success of any plan to expand primary education must centre around enrolment of students and the prevention of those once enrolled from becoming drop-outs. The proposal to make primary education compulsory may not have the desired effect if the government is unable to set up simultaneously an efficient monitoring system or is unable to remove the basic social causes which create the drop-outs to begin with.

According to the figures of 1987 a total 11,075,500 children in the ratio of 56.39:43.61, with the preference going towards the boys, were enrolled in the 44,205 primary schools estimated to be 61% of the total number of school-age children between the ages of 6-10 years. These figures indicate that almost 8 million children are not enrolled at all, but missing from the statistics are the number who never complete the first five years of schooling which runs the gamut of primary education. Of the increasing number of drop-outs each year, the majority are girls.

Reasons for the large exodus of girls from the education system are varied, but largely social more than economic, although one of the economic factors is shortage of funds which forces the parents to favour the male child to the detriment of the female, but in addition the lack of conveniences favouring the girls child tends to alienate her from the educational set-up.

The present system of learning by rote has its roots in defective teaching methods which equates the curriculum with the text-book and greater emphasis is laid on memorising parrot fashion a set of facts and figures which bears little or no relationship to everyday living experience and revolves only around classroom learning without giving the child chance for any extra-curricula learning or the development of the mind. Thus boredom sends many a child into the wilderness. There is little, if any, learning of the higher order which exposes children to the search for skills which involve self-learning through creativity.

Although the government introduced a text-book policy which allowed books to be distributed free of cost to all primary children, many of these books were resold or simply torn up and thrown away rather than being put to any productive use. The cost of this project has already tripled over the years between 1983-87 and the provision for free paper for this distribution by UNICEF will cease in 1992 which is now just around the corner and the government will have to think of alternatives. The basic requirement for any education system is the text-book which in our country is poor both in content and quality.

The government is alive to these problems but paucity of funds and motivation are still the major handicaps to improved standards of schooling which may serve to keep the children where they should be, in school, at least up to class five. The hope of ensuring a total of 90% enrolment by the end of the century in this vulnerable age group will be counterbalanced by the increased number of drop-outs unless more classrooms, greater number of teachers (the present teacher student ratio is 50:1), and improvements in curriculum and in the production of text-books is not carried out effectively.