

Labour Migration and Diminishing Schooling Opportunities for Children

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Abstract

Rukmini argues that educational deprivation among children is a many sided burden caused by a plethora of disadvantages at the household level, and further aggravated by inadequate support mechanisms from the state. She makes a case study with the welfare programmes of the government catering to people belonging either to the rural or urban space and show how those who move out of this 'space' surrender their right to entitlements of support systems, and thus remain deprived. The case study shows that educational deprivation among the children of migrant workers is the least addressed of all reasons why children are out of school.

Keywords: Universal Elementary Education, Educational Deprivation, School Dropout, Distressed Labour Migrants, Unorganized Sector

Introduction

Human capital has been recognized as a potential tool for mitigating poverty, improving labour productivity and breaking the vicious cycle of poverty. In this background, and thus educational deprivation is recognized as the primary agent of human deprivation. The utmost value of education lies in its role in building human capabilities and enlarging people's choices so that they can 'be' and 'do' what they value most.¹ Adam Smith, one of the earliest development thinkers of the world puts his way of recognizing the role of education for emancipation as follows, he wrote: "...the most dissimilar character, between a philosopher and a common street porter, for example, seems to arise not so much from nature, as from habit, custom, and education..."²

According to Smith all men are born equal by nature and it is the differences in opportunities one gets, such as education that makes a person different from another.

The importance of universalizing elementary education has been well seized since the time of framing of our constitution. In spite of the commendable milestones achieved in increasing literacy from around 17 per cent in 1951 to 74.04 per cent as of

1 Amartya Sen, "Human Capital and Human Capability", in Sakiko, Fukuda-Parr & A.K. Shivakumar in (ed.), *Readings in Human Development*, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 35.

2 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nation*, London, W. Strahan & T. Cadell, 1776.

Census 2011, the challenge of providing Free and Compulsory Universal Elementary Education (UEE) still looms large. Barriers to schooling continue to exist and persist in various forms, and prevent children from getting "meaningful access"³ to schools. The crucial indicator of success in elementary education is not enrolment alone but the survival rate of children in school and their success in transition from primary to upper primary and beyond. The transition rate from primary to upper primary level is at 83.85 per cent for all states in India as of 2008-09. The same for backward states like Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh is much lower at around 70 per cent on average.⁴

The largest of the initiatives taken by the Government towards accomplishment of Universal Elementary Education is the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) launched in 2001. The primary aim of SSA has been to universalize access and enrolment to elementary education, along with ensuring universal retention with equity among all children in the age of 6-14 years. The success of SSA has been laudable but despite giant strides taken to combat systemic deficiencies in provision of universal access to elementary education, the recent Survey Report on Out of School Children revealed that 4.28 per cent (i.e. 81,50,617 out of 190,582,58) children in the age group 6-13 years were out of school. The report also highlighted the urban-rural dichotomy as, 4.53 per cent of these children belonged to rural areas and 3.18 per cent belonged to urban areas, mainly slums. The most common reason revealed from the survey of drop outs was poverty/ economic reason (27 per cent).⁵

The crucial reasons for low school participation and missing educational opportunities among the poor suggests that there still exists inadequacies in supply side variables of educational provisioning, in the form of high direct costs of schooling, low quality of schooling facilities and a host of socio-economic factors. These factors have distinct characters in the particular contexts of different households.⁶ That poor parents are not interested in their children's education has been dispelled as a myth, and their growing interest in children's education is gaining recognition.⁷ However, there is a need to make a distinction between the value and aspiration poor parents have for children's education and their actual ability to materialize these aspirations by investing on the costs of schooling and sending children regularly to school.

3 "meaningful access" means enrolment, regular attendance in school, learning achievements, making transitions to higher classes and completion of at least the elementary level as used by Vimala Ramachandran & Aarti Saihjee, "The New Segregation: Reflections on Gender and Equity in Primary Education", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, (Apr. 27 - May 3), No. 17, 2002, 1600.

4 National University of Educational Planning and Administration, Flash Statistics, DISE, 2009-10.

5 Survey Report of Out of School Children, Government of India, 2009, Available, url.www.educationforallindia.com/Survey-Report-of-%20out-of-school-children-IMRB-MHRD-EDCil-2009.pdf (accessed 8, Sept, 2011).

6 Pratiche India Trust, "The Delivery of Primary Education: A Study in West Bengal", *The Pratiche Education Report*, New Delhi, 2002.

Pratiche India Trust, "Primary Education in West Bengal: Changes and Challenges", *The Pratiche Education Report II*, New Delhi, 2009.

7 PROBE, *Public Report on Basic Education in India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999.

Labour mobility is a sine qua non for the growth process of any nation because, labour flows through migration is considered as the most rational way of matching the demand for with the supply of work opportunities. This is technically the way migration works by striking equilibrium between demand and supply of labourers and propelling the economy. Simultaneously, the phenomenon simultaneously also portrays regionally unbalanced growth and development in the 'labour catchment' areas which lack the very dynamism that migrants create in their work destinations. In a primarily agrarian economy like India, with a dominant majority of landless and land poor households finding it increasingly difficult to secure a stable and sustainable means of livelihood; it is most often the case that children's education is sacrificed at the altar of poverty and hunger despite the awareness of its value. A study in the tribal villages of Jharkhand has revealed that the daily struggle for 'filling up the stomach' preoccupied the people, rendering them incapable of sending children to school.⁸

The agrarian crisis which has historical connections is being deepened under the neo-liberal reforms. These concerns are crucial because the Indian economy is still primarily agricultural. Talking about the structural transformation of the economy, there was neither sufficient industrialization nor a sea change of occupation profiles of the masses from agricultural to industrial. According to Census 2001, although around 72.2 per cent of the population in India lives in the rural areas and are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood; the GDP from agriculture has been growing sluggishly at a rate of only 1.8 per cent in the post-reform period. With declining size of landholdings, the proportion of marginal farmers cultivating less than one hectare of land has crossed 80 million and are increasingly turning to laboring-out their manpower for wages in order to supplement earnings.⁹

Crisis in the agrarian structure is thus manifested not only through farmer suicides (indicating rising costs of cultivation, declining yield and growth rate of crops) but it is also about slow growth of non- farm employment opportunities. The employment potential of agriculture is declining and there is an increasing 'redundancy of agricultural labour' in the rural market. Juxtaposing these alarming situations obviously questions the sustainability of the largest section of the rural population, who are either land poor or landless. In a situation of declining state concern over the livelihoods of the rural milieu vis-a-vis a highly prioritized urban-centric agenda for growth, the rural laboring sections are increasingly responding to dwindling employment opportunities through outmigration. The figure of the actual scale and magnitude of employment related labour outmigration taking place from rural areas to other rural and or urban areas is difficult to quote. Official data on migration so far provided by the NSSO suffer from definitional and conceptual flaws which result in massive under-reporting

8 Kumar Rana & Samantak Das, "Primary Education in Jharkhand", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, (March 13-19), No. 11, 2004, 1173.

9 V.S Vyas, "Marginalised Sections of Indian agriculture: The Forgotten Millions", *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol. 50, No. 1, 2007.

due to problems in identifying temporary internal migrants in India. The 64th round (2007-08) of NSS estimated the number of temporary migrants at around 12 million in India. In order to capture short term migrants in this round, even those migrants were counted who had stayed outside the village or town for at least one month but not more than six months during the last 365 days for employment or in search of employment.¹⁰ While a more reliable data source is welcome, we have to move beyond these numbers to the nuances of the phenomenon and implications of mass mobility under distressed conditions. This needs qualitative probing into the dynamic process of labour migration which involves complex negotiations to be made at the micro and macro level.

Where the question of survival looms large, the idea of an alternate livelihood opportunity is welcome. But still a question remains from a larger development perspective that whether migration is a stepping stone to more remunerating work opportunities and better livelihoods for the rural poor, or is it only a vicious cycle that continues to serve only as an escape to afford the 'absolute needs' for survival? The field evidences are of course mixed.

One such grim face in its starkest forms is educational deprivation of children in the case of landless/land poor households who resort to seasonal family migration as a strategy to supplement earnings.¹¹ Irrespective of the "welfare and ill-fare" that the household experiences in general, this pattern of migration has been found to result in constraining regular attendance and continuation of children's schooling because migration periods have been found to conflict with children's schooling in the source villages.¹² The children of these households are trapped in inter-generational cycles of distress seasonal migration in sectors such as brick kilns, salt pans and sugarcane fields in the western parts of India, particularly Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in the south.¹³

While there is no evidence of a complete neglect of issues on educational deprivation, it cannot be denied that policy and planning in India is more oriented towards the population who are permanent residents. Those who migrate have been found to be left out of even basic entitlements such as the food distribution policies such as the Public Distribution System (PDS), health and educational services such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), and constitutional provisions such

10 "Migration in India", National Sample Survey Organisation, NSS Report No. 533, Sixty Fourth Round, National Sample Survey Office Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation Government of India, June, 2007-2008, available url. www.mospi.nic.in/mospi_nssso_rept_pubn.

11 Jan Breman, *The Poverty Regime in Village India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2007.

12 Ben Rogaly, Jhuma Biswas, Daniel Coppard, Abdur Rafique, Kumar Rana, Amrita Sengupta, "Seasonal Migration, Social Change and Migrants Rights: Lessons from West Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 36, (Dec. 8-14), No. 49 2001, p. 4556.

13 National University of Educational Planning and Administration, Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity, 'Distress Seasonal Migration and its Impact on Children's Education, Create Pathways To Access', Research Monograph No. 28, May 2008, pp. 11-12.

as the Right to Free and Compulsory Education.¹⁴ Migration periods have been found to coincide with school's academic calendar in the villages, thereby resulting in long periods of absence from school, difficulty in coping up in class after returning and subsequent drop out. Another problem of migrating children is their inability to access any educational support or schooling facilities in their respective work destinations, except for the creditable initiatives taken by certain NGOs to open learning centers in destination work sites. Deprived of care, nutrition and hygiene at the work sites and coerced by parents to contribute to piece-rate work, children involve themselves in hard labour and any possibility of upward mobility is negated.¹⁵ Ramachandran has articulated such deprivation as a 'continuous and cumulative nature of social and economic exclusion children face from the moment of conception.'¹⁶

While this could be the one of the most blatant forms of marginalization of seasonally migrant children, there are also other more implicit and indirect ways in which children of migrants experience barriers to successful completion of elementary schooling. To bring the experiences of such a phenomenon closer to home, the author would like to cull out some field evidence regarding the schooling opportunities of children of stone quarry workers and potters settled near the Balasan River in Matigara, district Darjeeling.¹⁷ It is important to clarify that the findings which the author wants to share here are not similar to the studies that have focused on children migrating seasonally with their parents. The study area, that is the two colonies situated near the banks of Balasan River in Matigara, do not provide any robust evidence of seasonally migrating children. In fact a majority of these children were born in Matigara and are therefore not even migrants by the Census definition. The study was originally designed to understand the ways in which barriers to elementary education were emerging in an area where parents depended on the unorganized sector for a livelihood. It tried to weave the macro and micro level issues which have implications on the household level in terms of the processes and adjustments under which barriers emerge and diminish schooling opportunities. Through a rigorous fieldwork in 2008-09 in these two colonies it was found that the constraints to successful schooling arise due to different socio-economic household characteristics that are peculiar to those surviving in the hazards of low end jobs in the unorganized sector and also due to the lacunae in policy making which do not address such problems in a contextualized manner. We do not discuss all these issues here, as in this paper the author is particularly interested in trying to bring up a qualitative understanding of the association between migration of parents and their precarious livelihoods with children's participation in school. The

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

15 Smita, *Locked Homes and Empty Schools-Impact of Distress Seasonal Migration on the Rural Poor*, New Delhi, Zubaan, 2007, p. 26.

16 Vimala Ramachandran, & Aarti Saihjee, *op.cit.*, p.1612.

17 The results discussed emerge from field work undertaken for a dissertation for the award of Master of Philosophy in Development Studies of the University of Calcutta, Rukmini Thapa, "Barriers to Elementary Education faced by Children of Unorganized Sector Workers: An Exploratory Study in Matigara Block", 2009, (Unpublished).

survey brings statistics, and qualitative probing during the field studies tell us the story behind these numbers.

The Matigara Case

The earliest settlers occupied the banks of the river in the 1970s and made temporary huts of plastic sheets. These families, who mainly migrated from Bihar and Bangladesh, had been driven out of their areas of their villages mainly due to landlessness, and political unrest. Among the early migrants were also leprosy patients, who had suffered a social stigma in their villages and had come for free treatment to 'Jisu Ashram'.¹⁸ Initiative towards spreading education among poor children was spearheaded by Sr. Ivana of the "Jisu Ashram." Sr. Ivana lured the children of the migrant quarry workers and leprosy patients into attending school by providing them four meals a day. She believed that the children would initially go to school to eat, but gradually develop the habit of sitting in class and learning. The idea fulfilled the twin objective of meeting poor children's nutritional requirement as well as educating them. Today, we commonly understand this programme as Mid Day Meal, implemented on a national scale in India since 2001.

Despite Right to Education being made a Fundamental Right in India, Universal Elementary education seemed to be a distant dream among children of the study area. A sample of 100 households was taken from two colonies situated on either sides of the National Highway 31, near the Balasan River Bridge in Matigara which we cross as we travel towards Bagdogra from Siliguri. The surveyed households were dominantly quarry workers and potters. In these 100 households, there were 200 children in the age group of 6-14 years, 70 in the 6-9 age group category and 130 in the 10-14 years. We found that while the dropout rate was negligible in the 6-9 years age group, there were 11 children who had never been enrolled in school. In the 10-14 years age category, the drop out increased sharply to 22 percent along with the presence of eight children who had never enrolled. The presence of a large number of never enrolled children belonging to the minority community pointed to the failure of the Government Primary School and the Sishu Siksha Kendra¹⁹ (SSK) of the area in bringing these children into school. At the same time non-participation in education despite easy physical access to government or local body run primary schools, highlighted constraining demand side factors even in the primary level, where direct costs of schooling is low (not considering the cost of private tuition). Unlike other studies on constraints to elementary education, the research showed that all children both boys and girls in the age group of 10-14 years, whose parents were engaged in some occupation under the

18 'Jisu Ashram' was founded by Canadian Jesuit priests, Robert Mittleholtz, SJ, and Brother Bob near the river Balasan in Matigara in 1971. It was a hospital set up to treat tuberculosis and leprosy. The ashram also rehabilitated homeless leprosy patients.

19 It was launched by government of West Bengal in 1997-98 for universalizing primary education. It is demand driven, community based and community managed. The community can move the Panchayat to open a Sishu Siksha Kendra (SSK) if there is no school within 1 km.

unorganized sector, were vulnerable to drop out, irrespective of income level, sex of the child, caste background and education of parents.²⁰

Livelihood Related Barriers - The school is still far away

Enabling factors at school and household level or the lack of it together decide the ultimate schooling status of children. This is true for children across all socio-economic backgrounds. But it cannot be neglected that the migrant workers engaged in low-end jobs are the ones who are least capable of providing 'enabling' conditions for educating their children. It is also technically correct to argue that migration as an exit option from hunger and unemployment also brings the workers to more urbanized areas where better schools are available. In the study area, there was one Government Primary School (GPS), two SSK and a private missionary school 'Jisu Niketan' available at a distance of less than 1km from both colonies. After Class IV the children attended mainly two schools for secondary education; 'Matigara Harosundar Boys High School' and 'Matigara Balika Vidyalaya.' These schools lie at a distance of around 1.5 km from the two colonies, and were situated near the Matigara Bazaar area which is not very far. Secondary schools in GP 'Atharakhai' of Matigara block were also physically accessible to children. It is thus not sufficient to have the availability of schools in urban areas where migrants have come; it is rather about whether their children are able to access them and successfully complete at least eight years of schooling.²¹

The study revealed that for migrants who had settled along the banks of the Balasan River, employment opportunity to earn better incomes did not necessarily mean that they were able to provide better schooling opportunities for their children. The association between income of parents and schooling status of children was not a straight one, which shows that there were many other socio-political and health related factors that impeded child's participation in school. We found that workers complained of fatigue, weakness, chest pain, blood pressure and stomach related disorders which they perceived to be the outcome of strenuous work for a prolonged period of time. Income shocks were rampant in times of illness. As a result, the children in the age group of 10 to 14 years (who were more physically able to work than those in the 6-9 years age group) either dropped out of school or remained absent for long periods for care-giving, as well as, compensating for the income loss by working in lieu of their parents. This was mostly the case of the eldest child in the household. This is one peculiarity of home-based work such as quarrying in the river where easy and quick substitutability in work occurs irrespective of gender. The same may not be the case in other types of work such as rickshaw pulling (male work, where we do not see children pulling rickshaw); domestic workers (mainly female work) or other

20 Out of 100 households, 66 percent of the head of the household were illiterate, 15 percent were literate below the primary level, 13 percent had completed up to primary level and 6 percent had studied beyond primary level.

21 There are further issues related to the quality of learning provided in these schools, but we do not discuss it in our study.

kinds of skilled work in the informal sector. The absence of barriers to entry into work increased the chances of children in joining the work force at an early age. It became all the more difficult to distinguish between child labour and children helping their parents. Technically, the 'sardars' of the quarry do not employ child workers per se but the contribution of children towards family earning is nevertheless inevitable and conspicuously rampant.

While it is true that these children work but with regard to their participation in work, we do not want to simplify the argument by saying that children drop out or children being enrolled, is the result of not being involved in working. So we do not argue in terms of the dichotomy between work and school. We rather explain the complex dynamics of several factors which cumulatively reduce the chances of children schooling. One important factor is the combined pressure of coping with school, domestic work and income earning work. The effect of this burden for a prolonged period caused poor performance in school, grade repetition and ultimately dropping out. In fact, whether parents were ill or not children reported to help their parent/s in work every day before and after school and more during the week end. This was true for the children of potters also.

Studies on child labour are often centered on the argument of 'opportunity cost of a child's schooling' in terms of income forgone if the child is sent to school instead of work. In our study we articulate this in a slightly different way. Some studies see mother's work participation as a positive impact due to addition to household resources which help in meeting the direct costs of schooling, while other researches in West Bengal shows that mother's labour force participation and girls' own work participation were both positively associated with drop out.²² With labour force participation among women at 84 per cent out of the 100 households surveyed, burden of work on children especially on girls above ten years old was high. The opportunity cost of sending a girl child to school was found to be high because it involved not the income forgone by the child if she went to school, but the income forgone by the mother if she was not freed from domestic work at home. We found the eldest daughters dropping school and taking up household chores to enable their mothers to engage in income earning work. This was found true for all female headed households. It was also true in households where the male head of the household had further out-migrated to other cities and towns, leaving their wives to manage the household and also engage in economic activities. Mothers utilized the services of their girl children either to augment output or manage the household, or even both. Quarrying and pottery workers are paid at piece-rate, thus it was important to augment output with the help of the labour input of un-paid family members.

We also found a female-headed household with three never enrolled children. All children migrated to the neighboring towns every two months with their mother to

22 Pyali Sengupta & Jaba Guha, "Enrolment, Dropout and Grade Completion of Girl Children in West Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, (Apr. 27-May 3), No. 17, 2002, 1621-37.

collect disposed plastic articles. As they had no relatives in the colony the children could not be kept back to go to school. Further, the children's contribution to work increased their earnings. Children thus had difficulty in finding familial support and a suitable atmosphere for study, even though they technically had access to schools, not far away from home.

Perception, Insecurity and Indifference - Seeking support mechanisms

Education has been valued among the rich and poor for many reasons both economic and non-economic, such as, in order to learn how to read, write and count, avoid being cheated, get better employment opportunities, be able to migrate to bigger cities with some level of confidence, be eligible for loan facilities, be able to understand and handle official paper work, and also to improve social status, self esteem and build self confidence. Such perception towards education was found even in our study but besides these conventional responses, we found some perceptual differences. It is important first to understand how a migrant perceives his own existence in the destination area, either as a temporary settlement or with the motive of settling permanently. Perception of their existence in the destination area has ramifications on the kind of investments they make for the house and for the family. The first issue which struck us was the high value migrants attached towards ownership of land. Ownership of land meant holding power. Quarry workers bivouacking closer to the river did not have any land documents. Most had settled with the permission of the 'sardar,' under whom they worked, and the Panchayat member of that 'Gram Sansad.'²³ Their first and foremost priority was to save up money and purchase some land in their native place which was most commonly, Thakurganj, in Bengal-Bihar border. They well understood that under the strenuous nature of quarrying work, they aged faster and developed physical weakness. That meant that the work span was short after which they intended to return to their villages and fall back on the land purchased. There was thus an imperative to work more and earn as much as possible when physically able. This necessitated them to take their children's help too. While some parents wanted their sons to aspire for salaried work which would not be so strenuous, there were some others who had decided that their sons would continue working in the river, and there, education was hardly a necessity. As for their daughters, they held marriage more important than education. It did not matter whether they completed school. Parents feared keeping grown up daughters at home as the social and religious background of the settlement in the river bed was heterogeneous. With labourers, contractors and truck drivers from diverse backgrounds working in the river bed, parents feared inter-caste marriages and any incident that would bring dishonor to the family.

Another reason which influenced them in holding such a perception and valuing education less was because being settled in a peri-urban area they saw the private

23 Under the 73rd Amendment of the constitution, West Bengal Government has made provision of Gram Sansad where all voters of each of the electorate constituencies of a GP constitute a Gram Sansad.

schools where children of the more affluent class went. These schools were of course not monetarily accessible to them but they had a tendency to look down upon the government schools of Matigara which they thought would never help their children in securing good jobs. Migrants from Thakurganj who were dominantly from minority backgrounds were not interested in sending their children to Bengali medium schools. Their children were rather sent to the "*Madrassah*."²⁴ They considered English speaking as the ticket to better opportunities in bigger cities. Being a very mobile class they also knew that if their sons went to Delhi and Mumbai to work, it was ability in Hindi, and not Bengali that mattered. This perception too dampened their interest in sending children to school. It was therefore difficult to draw out any strict association between earnings and the ability of parents to send children to school without considering these factors. It was not surprising to see a number of never enrolled and dropped out children who had mobile phones, television and video players at home. Young drop out boys were on the lookout for opportunities to out migrate for work. The concept of 'kaam sikhna'²⁵ was very important to them.

This is not to mean that barriers to education emerged entirely out of demand constraints. Supply factors, such as cost of schooling and unattractiveness of schools also caused disinterest among children and parents. Education as claimed by the government was not completely free. The main reason why education was expensive was mainly because of the cost of private tuition. With all the debate which has engaged both policy makers and academicians regarding whether private tuition should be allowed, there is still a need for them to reconsider the ground realities. The importance of private tuition is difficult to challenge in case of such households where children are first generation learners, who neither get parental guidance in studies nor individual attention from the school teacher who teaches in crowded classrooms with students numbering anywhere between 100 to 150. Students who had completed class four from 'Jisu Ashram' school expressed great dissatisfaction and frustration due to the congestion, chaos and indiscipline in classrooms they faced once they joined class five in the government boys and girls school. The adjustment to the new environment and new school system also caused coping up problems after class four.

Besides this, text books are given free only up to class five after which the direct cost of education increases sharply. Grade repetition after class five, difficulty in getting admission in class five, i.e., the time when students appear for an entrance test in the high school after completing class four, are all factors that de-motivated continuing school. It was no wonder why we found maximum number of drop outs in class five.

The next factor we found important is the difference in the attitude of migrants settled in the river bed with those of the potters who owned land and intended to stay on permanently. The feeling of belongingness and social cohesiveness was seen to come

24 School for religious Islamic studies.

25 on-the-work-training or apprentice-ship.

out of a sense of perceiving their existence as temporary or permanent. This difference in attitude is reflected from the difference in the way they exercised their 'voice', and asserted their demand for basic amenities. Among the mixed social group in the river bed where newer migrants kept coming, the obvious economic rivalry that existed due to dependence on a common natural resource, bred only enmity. The potter's colony where there was more social and religious homogeneity, exhibited better communal harmony and ability to assert accountability from primary school teachers of the colony. This increased the efficiency of these schools compared to the Sishu Shiksha Kendra located in the river bed. The resentment of *sahayikas*²⁶ to work under pretexts of lack of hygiene and disregard towards the social and ethnic dimension of children, also questioned the SSK as an institution which is designed to cater to the educational needs of the most marginalized. The poor functioning of the SSK in the river bed was reflected by children's average daily attendance of less than 50 per cent (children seemed to 'vote with their feet.'). Therefore loose social cohesiveness, missing sense of rights and lack of a feeling of being rooted to the soil along with the plans of moving on for better opportunities, prevented community participation. The same attitude of indifference was extended also by their elected leaders. One stark way which reflects the unimportance shown towards their needs by the local political representative was the fact that, while the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) was introduced for the potters' colony in 1991, it was opened in the river bed for quarry workers only in 2007.

Domestic barriers and structural and social factors operated in tandem to weaken institutions initialized for children having insecure livelihoods, thereby making the scope for UEE in the study area bleak.

Conclusion

Through an analysis in the demand-supply framework, this paper has identified certain barriers to education among children of migrant laborers and re-emphasizes that inability to assert demand for education is an issue, not completely due to disinterest in education but because of issues related to the pressure of unsustainable livelihoods, weighing of cost and perceived benefits of educating a child and insensitive nature of educational delivery processes. Inter-generational cycle of distress migration has been least addressed in governmental policy planning. Survey Report on Out of School Children of 2009 revealed that 4.28 per cent in the age group 6-13 years were out of school, among which 5.22 per cent children were from families living below the poverty line. A perusal of the report which is apparently the most recent documentation of out of school children, gives fairly detailed information on the scale out of school children and reasons underlying it. However, there is no mention of children who have dropped out due to migratory patterns of livelihood of parents. Perhaps, it is included under the

26 Female teacher at SSK.

category of rural poor children but it is totally camouflaged which negates its chances of being addressed separately as a serious form of deprivation.

Educational deprivation is multidimensional and children who fail to access or complete a basic education cycle do not constitute a homogenous group. It is important not to categorize all these children together, as they have different access needs and contexts. Thus the first policy implication of the study would be to formally acknowledge the problem, its scale, and consequences, in order to capture the attention of policy makers. Besides the micro level household constraints, the study also points out the need for strengthening the supportive services for children in school such as extension of the provision of free books at least up to class eight, maintenance of an optimal teacher-student ratio and arrangement of remedial classes for weaker students for whom the cost of private tuition may be difficult to bear. Provision of schools which cater to the specific needs of children of migrant workers in the origin and destination areas is of utmost importance so that educational opportunities of children remain insulated from the precarious livelihoods and occupations of their parents. India's growth rate has been increasing like never before, but the masquerade of increasing GDP obscures the struggles of the marginalized sections²⁷ whose services have fuelled the growth of the economy. There is a need to recognize that fundamental right to education of children will continue to be violated time and again unless the social and economic security of labour migrants and all workers in the unorganized sector is safeguarded to empower them so that they can be in a position to protect the right of the children .

While education is considered as a tool to break the vicious cycle of poverty by creating human capital, increasing productivity and leading to higher incomes; this path is difficult to follow for the poor who are more vulnerable to taking the option of quitting school primarily due to economic pressure along with the lack of any motivation to continue schooling under the pressure of multiple burdens. This further underscores the need for adopting context specific strategies rather than a blanket policy so that UEE is provided in a manner that it reaches and empowers children of all backgrounds to break the 'inter-generational cycle of disadvantages.'